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Master thesis

# Memory of Stalinist deportations in Moldova: an analysis of Chisinau memoryscape

Stalinistlike küüditamiste mäletamine Moldovas: Chisinau mälumaastiku analüüs



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## **Table of abbreviation**

KGB - Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, Committee for State Security

LGBT - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people

MSSR - Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic

NKVD - Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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# 1. Introduction

This thesis is dedicated to the Republic of Moldova – a small landlocked country located in Eastern Europe between Romania and Ukraine. Although its hilly vineyard-spangled landscape, little villages with decorated colourful houses, and mild climate makes Moldova a pleasant and beautiful place, the country itself faces many problems and challenges. Moldova holds a European prerogative in two categories: it is the poorest European country regarding both GDP (Gross domestic product) and HDI (Human development index), and it is also the least visited country in the whole continent. Its economy depends mainly on agriculture with predominance of winery.<sup>1</sup> Moldova is inhabited by 3, 400 000 people, but this number is probably exaggerated; firstly, it includes the inhabitants of separatist region of Transnistria where central government has no power, and secondly, it does not take into account the massive population loss that has been Moldova facing since the independence in 1991. Estimates say that between 600,000 – 1 million people have left the country mostly for European Union or Russia since the independence which equates to almost one-third of the overall population. The worst situation is in the countryside which suffers from population loss more dramatically than the capital.<sup>2</sup> Depopulation and brain-drain are one of the most striking issues of contemporary Moldova; young and educated people have been leaving the country which crucially affects Moldovan development in all possible directions. With an exception of the capital of Chisinau (with estimate number of 680, 000 citizens) and some other bigger cities (for example Orhiev or Bałți), the rest of the country have been experiencing serious problems connected with the depopulation. Another great challenge for Moldova is its state integrity. Moldova includes separatist Russia-backed Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (also known as Transnistria) which broke away from Moldova in 1990, and Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia which was established in 1994, and remains part of Moldova under special conditions. Besides the fragility of the state and population loss, widespread corruption, high level of poverty, poor healthcare, and underdeveloped infrastructure makes everyday life of Moldovan citizen quite difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> Europe: Moldova. In: The World Factbook [online]. [Accessed 2019-01-21]. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html>

<sup>2</sup> Recensământ.statistica.md. (2017). Recensământul Populației și al Locuințelor 2014. [online]. [Accessed 2019-01-17] Available at: <http://recensamant.statistica.md/>

This thesis aims to go deeper to the history, concretely to 20<sup>th</sup> Century events connected with Second World War and following Soviet period; times marked with mass killings, deportations, repressions, tortures and humiliations of ten thousands of people. As the title of the thesis indicates the work aims to examine the various performances of memory of Soviet deportations from Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, and more broadly of Soviet repressions as such. It aims to show how these events have been remembered, commemorated, narrated and interpreted within Moldovan memory landscape, concretely in the context of Moldovan capital of Chisinau. The deportations were massive displacement of inhabitants of Bessarabia (nowadays Moldova) who were forced by Soviet militants and local collaborators to leave their homes and move to far-away Siberia or Central Asia. More than 60 000 of people have been affected in three successive deportation waves in 1941, 1949 and 1951, many of them dying either on the way or later in Siberia due to illnesses, injuries, overwork or malnutrition (Casu, 2015). The process of deportation would follow approximately this scenario: families were awakened by Soviet soldiers during the deep night so they would be disoriented and vulnerable, and they were told to pack quickly (they had maximum of forty minutes for that) only the most necessary things (limit was forty kilo per family). Then they were taken by trucks to nearest train station where they were forced to board a train that took them to their place of destination in Siberia or in Kazakhstan. The men were mostly separated from the rest of the family, and send to labour camps or gulags, so the women were often left alone only with their children or old parents in a new and hostile environment of Soviet Far East (Casu, 2010). How has been these atrocities remembered within Moldovan society is the main topic of the thesis.

However, in a case of Moldova it is not easy at all to speak about ‘the memory’. The debate on Moldovan recent past is extremely contested and fragmented, and lacks any agreement that would eventually lead to coherent narrative, understandable and believable for majority of Moldovans. The lack of believable collective story that would enable to establish a social framework through which people can organize their identity and sense of belonging influences everyday life of Moldovans. Andreas Huyssen (2003) said that the past stays alive when it ‘is still not in place’, when it ‘has no possibility to settle down’. The absence of an established collective story not only threatens the identity of the group but also risks that the past keeps informing political decisions in the present (Hodgkin & Redstone, 2003). And that is exactly the case of Moldova. The intellectual and political elites have proved to be highly incapable of building a common and coherent national idea, and therefore Moldovan statehood has remained fragile. The fragmentation of memory, the lack of coherent narrative

on what should be included and what should be left out in the story a nation tells itself about a traumatic past, and contested memory-making processes are leitmotifs of this thesis.

The thesis examines the debate on the memory and narratives of the Soviet deportations in whole Moldova; however, my fieldwork has been conducted predominantly in Chisinau, and thus my collected data and material deal mostly with the capital. Chisinau is the field I am most acquainted with, and even though I have carried out my fieldwork also in other Moldovan regions, Chisinau has always been my ‘headquarter’, and I have spent most of the time there. Moreover, people of different opinions on the events are based in Chisinau; activists, artists, journalists, historians, museum workers, survivors..., and also most of the institutions dealing with this era are located in the capital. Chisinau is definitely a special case and I am perfectly aware of the fact that the situation in Chisinau might differ significantly from the reality in other bigger cities or in the countryside. Nevertheless, I am convinced that Chisinau reflects the general mood of the country quite well.

### **1.1. Research questions and thesis structure**

Moldova is a peculiar case for memory studies. Since the memory of forced deportations is fragmented into multiple places and incoherent narratives that are still in the process of evolving, it felt necessary to deploy a special approach focusing precisely on the plurality and heterogeneity of memory surrounding the Soviet forced deportations. The most suitable framework for this thesis is the ‘memoryscape’. This concept will be introduced more deeply later in the thesis, yet shortly put, the memoryscape allows to approach the Moldovan reality as a metaphorical landscape where various memories surrounding forced Soviet deportations meets, emerge, shifts or disappear. The main building stones of the memoryscape are ‘realms of memory’- material or non-material depositories of memory that uphold the identity and memory of communities (Szpociński, 2016). Saying that, the aim of this thesis is to analyse the memoryscape of forced Soviet deportations from MSSR during 1940s and 1950s with an emphasis on the capital of Chisinau by identifying the realms of memory, and analysing the ways they participate on the creation of the memoryscape. What realms of memory connected with forced Soviet deportations can we identify? What message do they aim to convey? Who is the target audience – who do they want to speak to? How do they help to construct the identity and notions of the recent past?



The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic, offers basic information about Moldova and also reflects on the fieldwork. In the second chapter dedicated to theoretical and methodological framework the essential concepts and theories including more detailed discussion on theory of memoryscape and realms of memory is presented. The third chapter discusses Moldova as a mnemonic field and offers an introduction to Moldovan history, post-Soviet national building, politics of memory and issues connected with Moldovan identity. The fourth chapter draws on the fieldwork and empirically approaches the cityscape of Chisinau and the memory embedded there. It aims to reveal the main realms of memory in contemporary Chisinau and discuss their roles in the creation of the memoryscape of forced Soviet deportations.

## **1.2. Fieldwork**

My first encounter with Chisinau was in October 2016 when I did one-month long museology internship in local National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History. Albeit my internship was rather general without any special focus on any particular topic, working in the museum and traveling around the country showed me how interesting Moldova was, and contributed significantly to my later decision to study this place. Since then I have been in touch with local museum workers and I have consulted my research ideas with them. Next opportunity to go to Chisinau appeared in September 2018 and then again during spring of 2019. Also these times I collaborated with the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History. The museum turned out to be most important institution and local museum workers most valuable gatekeepers for my whole research. During February – May 2019 I was based in Iasi in Romanian Moldavia region where I continued in my fieldwork and research.

When I arrived to Moldova in 2018 I was not sure what to expect, and, retrospectively speaking, I was a bit naïve. At the beginning I was not fully aware of the challenges surrounding debates on Moldovan memory of recent past; or at least not fully aware of the complexity of the problematic. I was convinced that there is a demand for academic works concentrating on the actual survivors of the deportations, and I was under wrong impression that the stories have not been extensively collected and recorded, and that the memory has been disappearing from the society. However, this has been proved to be misguided assumption. There have been many people involved in collecting of the stories – scholars, NGO workers or artists, and private memory activists. In my opinion the research in Moldova

truly lacks something different: critical and unbiased theoretical works and enough formally educated scholars. In Moldova (and definitely not only in Moldova) history and memory studies become fields of political and ideological fights. Memory and narratives around Soviet period are contested, emotional, and political. There has been no consensus over the past among Moldovan society, no narrative and no new post-Soviet identity that would be strong enough to unite the citizens and offer them a sense of belonging. As a result I accepted the fact that it is not possible to create a coherent picture of Moldovan perception of the Soviet period resulting in one 'grand' narrative, thus, instead I chose to consider respective 'smaller' narratives as more or less isolated manifestations which contribute to the debate over the Soviet legacy and memory-making processes.

After realizing that my place is not amongst survivors collecting their stories, I decided to concentrate more on the key realms of memory that shape the debate on Soviet heritage and memory of the recent past. As a consequence, I conducted interviews mostly with people connected with the official or semi-official level of memory. Since there was a difference between Romanian and Russian speakers in perception of Soviet regime I tried to approach both of these groups. I spoke also with actual survivors of the deportations, but I was mostly interested in their perception of their own role in contemporary society rather than in their experience from Siberia. Regarding my gatekeepers and key informants, three people can be considered as the main gatekeepers; and all of them were workers of National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History. As Karen O'Reilly states in her book *Key concepts in Ethnography* "gatekeepers are sponsors or individuals who smooth access to the group. They are the key people who let us in, give us permission, or grant access. [...] key informant is an individual who becomes central to the ethnography for one of a number of possible reasons" (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 132). Majority of my informants were introduced to me thanks to these three museum workers. First of them was Andrei Prohin who smoothed my access to the museum, as he arranged all necessary paperwork, introduced me to all colleagues (who had not known me yet) and explained them my background and my research topic. Thanks to him I got into the museum structures, and was accepted by the staff and museum workers as a researcher and a colleague. I shared an office with another museum worker, Elena Cojocari, who was very friendly and supportive to me, and helped me a lot with finding my key informants. She had many good contacts and acquaintances in various research centres and institutions in Chisinau, and was always ready to establish a contact between me and respective scholars and researchers. Sometimes she even accompanied me and introduced me personally, and that resulted in more informal and friendly welcome from the informants. The

last gatekeeper, Ghenadie Popescu, was significant in establishing contacts between me and the deportations survivors. He was not acquainted with academia or scholarly work; however, he has been in touch with former deportees and their families, and being artist himself he networked me with people connected more with art, journalism and civil activism which was crucial for me as well. Thanks to him I was able to visit several formerly deported people and also witness the process of recording their testimonies.

I consider as one of the most important key informant historian Igor Cașu who works at Moldovan State University, and deals with Soviet period with emphasize on famine in 1940s. Cașu agreed to meet me several times at the university and helped me to get a better grasp on contemporary Moldovan approach towards the Soviet past. Another important person was Ludmila Cojocari, historian who works for National Museum of Archaeology and History in Chisinau. She deals with memory and concretely with memory of deportations. She was co-author of exhibitions dedicated to Soviet period, deportations and gulags in National museum of Archaeology and History. Historian and former minister of Youth and Sport Octavian Țicu provided me with interesting information as well. I met him at the Academy of Science only several days before his planned departure to Siberia where he was about to conduct an expedition dedicated to people deported from Moldovan SSR. Another informant was Anastasia Felcher. This contact turned out to be extremely useful as it gave me possibility to get in touch with Moldovan Russian-speaking researchers. Thanks to her I later met people with rather pro-Russian or pro-Moldavian approach which balanced my experience, as most of the workers of the museums were rather pro-Romanian. During my time in Romania I met memory and biography scholar Simona Mitroiu who helped me to better understand Romanian approach towards Memory Studies and traumatic resent past. Considering the fact that Romania is politically and historically important country for Moldova, I found it extremely interesting to get acquainted with local perceptions of post-Communist memory-making processes, and with the way how Romania has been dealing with its Communist heritage. As for people not connected with academic research I would name Victor Popovici and Ludmila Popovici. Victor Popovici is involved in introducing projects commemorating victims of both Soviet repressions and Holocaust - *The Last Address* and *Stolpersteine* - in Moldova. Ludmila Popovici is a head of NGO *Memoria* that helps victims of torture and repressions, and which used to carry out projects with deportations survivors. I have also spoken with actual deportation victims. These can be divided into two groups: those who have acquired some better education and consequently think about the events in a broader and more political way (predominantly people living in urban areas), and people who do not really care

about the politics or history, and are indifferent towards it (mostly in rural areas). It is possible to encounter nostalgia towards Soviet past even though these people were deported; it does not necessarily have to collide in minds of many.

I had a chance to accompany for a several times already mentioned museum worker Ghenadie Popescu on his fieldworks to countryside. He has been actively searching for former deportees, collecting their stories and publishing them online. When I accompanied Popescu to the field, people were contacted in advance, and asked whether Popescu can come, and collect their stories, so they were more or less prepared for the recording. The most interesting discussion, however, started after the video recorder was turned off. Then the people opened more, brought some wine and snacks and spoke more openly. Besides the deportees in the countryside I have also encountered those who live in capital city of Chisinau. I had a chance to speak with Valentina Sturza who has been for many years head of Association of Former Deportees and Political Detainees. She is an activist speaking out in a favour of victims of Soviet repressions. I met her in a museum during a special guided tour for former deportees. It was obvious that she is used to telling her story and speaking publicly. Besides Mrs. Sturza I met other former deportees in a Museum of National Memory, private museum dealing with deportations and Soviet repressions.

As it was already mentioned, my fieldwork took place mostly in Chisinau with several trips to Moldova's countryside. My predominant means of data collection were interviews and participant observation. My gatekeepers and informants can be divided into three groups:

1. Academics, scholars and researchers,
2. NGO workers, journalists, artists, activists,
3. Victims of deportations and repression and their family members

Among the most common interview styles belong structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews (O'Reilly, 2009). Structured interviews work with fixed sets of questions, while unstructured interviews mostly contain only a list of topics and themes to be covered without any strictly given questions. I used predominantly semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews contain elements of both structured and unstructured interviews; they include some fixed questions, but generally they are free-flowing and formless (ibid). Mostly, I have prepared a set of questions for each person individually, but there was always a great space for improvisation. I intended to be informal, relaxed, and prevent myself from pushing my interviewee into anything. In the beginning of my research

the questionnaires were a bit naïve, as I did not understand the situation as deeply as during later stages of my fieldwork. If I look through my field notes I can clearly see how the questions have been evolving, shaping and getting more and more elaborated and aware of the situation. That is why I visited some people for several times to discuss my new findings and impressions. Also, most of my interviews can be classified as so-called elite interviews: “Elite interviews are discussions with people who are chosen because of who they are or what position they occupy. That is, by ‘elite’ [we] do not necessarily mean someone of high social, economic, or political standing; the term indicates a person who is chosen by name or position for a particular reason, rather than randomly or anonymously” (Hochschild, 2009). To the category of elite interviews I include all the conversations with people from group one and two.

During my interviews I did not use any recorder, and instead of that I was just taking notes to my pocket-size notebook. I was convinced that without recorder the interviews are smoother, more open and friendly, and they can eventually turn into amiable chat. I wanted to create an environment of trust so my interviewees feel that they can open to me. I think that not using a recorder somehow helps to tear down the barrier between researcher and interviewee although, obviously, having the interview recorded might come very handy. The records can register intonation, tone of voice, or pauses etc., and also ensure that the research does not miss any important information. However, I argue that taking notes instead of recording should not be problem as long as researcher manages to get the main points correctly written down. I always took notes in my notebook and after the interview I entered all the information into my laptop together with as many details as I remembered. I did that immediately after the interview or observation in order not to forget anything important. My field notes consist not only of interviews notes, but also of my personal reflections on the interviews, observations and remarks. It includes long passages on my own perception and reflections on the situation. I also took many pictures to accompany my field notes. My photo material consist mostly of pictures of museum exhibitions, monuments and memory sites dedicated to repressions of Soviet period, photos from family albums of former deportees, archival documents, articles and books from the libraries etc.

Regarding the language of my fieldwork, I mostly used English and Russian. Majority of the scholars and other people from the first and second group were able to speak English, and those who were not spoke Russian to me. In the countryside I spoke only Russian because most inhabitants of rural area did not speak English. I have also started learning Romanian

and attended classes. Though, I was not able to learn the language after a month of intensive learning I was already able to understand some basic conversations or basic texts.

## 2. Theoretical and methodological framework

Moldova as a post-Soviet country is confronted with challenges of how to interpret and grasp its traumatic recent past of Soviet forced deportations and political repressions. It is essential to understand Moldova as a country in a process of defining its post-Soviet self, and therefore there is a demand to employ theories taking into account the peculiar situation of Moldovan collective memory, post-Soviet identity and post-Soviet memory-making. Speaking generally about post-Soviet national-building, it is a process of inventing new national histories, myths, traditions and spaces of national identity, memory and belonging that aim to grant legitimacy to the successor states and nations and emancipate them from the former Soviet identity.

Moldova is of course no exception and the post-Soviet negotiation of belonging is crucial challenge here as well. However, considering the main topic of this study – the memory – I decided to develop a theoretical and methodological framework drawing on concepts which I consider as key ones for the study of post-Soviet memory-making, among them at the prominent place the concepts of Pierre Nora's *lieux de memoire* and Maurice Halbwachs's 'collective memory'. Speaking about phenomena related to the processes of memory-making in post-Soviet Moldova it is necessary to mention silence and 'institutionalised amnesia'. Silence about the time in Siberia, and omission of the Siberian memory from public debates which was typical not only during the Soviet period but also in 1990s and early 2000s, left its deep traces on the process of reconciliation with the traumatic resent past. The victims of Soviet regime who were silenced during the Soviet period have not been encouraged to speak up after the Soviet Union collapsed, resulting in continuation of the 'politics of amnesia'. The term recuperative memory is closely connected, as it speaks about recovering of traumatic past even against the will of ruling political class. Another key concept is the famous post-memory which is accompanied here with theories of 'my-their' memory and chosen trauma. The post-memory is elaborated to fit peculiar case of post-Soviet space where the transmission of first-generation memory to the offspring of second and third generation was delayed or did not happen at all. Essential are also concepts of cosmopolitan memory and antagonistic memory or victimhood nationalism. The over-contextualisation of a suffering of a particular group might lead to nationalistic claims as 'we-victims' and 'they-victimizers', in a case of Moldova 'we, Romanian speakers as victims' and 'they, Russian speakers as victimizer' which makes the discussion on reconciliations among the divided

Moldovan society quite difficult. In comparison to the antagonistic memory, the concept of cosmopolitan memory as a theory which might bridge the division in societies will be discussed.

## **2.1. Memoryscape**

‘Memoryscape’ or landscape of memory is an interdisciplinary concept drawing on theories taken from Memory Studies and Cultural Geography. It understands landscape as a medium for representing memory and what is remembered or forgotten, and for communicating narratives, changes and tensions in contemporary society (Alderman & Inwood, 2013); “as a metaphorical landscape upon which memories and memory practices move, come into contact, are contested by, and contest other forms of remembrance; older ways of conceptualizing the past” (Phillips & Reyes, 2011, p.13). The memoryscape is grasped here as a “complex and vibrant plane upon which memories emerge, are contested, transformed, encounter other memories, mutate, and multiply” (ibid, p. 14). In this “sociomental topography of the past” (ibid, p. 14) the concepts of collective memory and *lieux de memoire* or ‘realms of memory’ play important role. As it will be argued and elaborated on following pages, collective story (what the communities remember) has been shaped through the realms of memory, and similarly the realms got their meaning according to collective story. Realms of memory serve as places where the memory is forged and deposited, or in other words – where the memory happens. Therefore, the intention is to explore the memoryscape as “a mix of convergences, intersections, and interactions of different regimes of memory” (Basu, 2007) by considering realms of memory associated with forced Soviet deportations from Moldova.

Thus, drawing on the above mentioned approaches, my theoretical framework aims at explaining Moldovan debate over the forced Soviet deportations as a metaphorical landscape with specific realms equating concrete depositories of the memory. As it was mentioned above, the thesis is limited only to territory of Chisinau which sets the memoryscape into urban environment of Moldovan capital city. In the thesis the manifestations which I consider to have a crucial role in shaping the debate will be examined. I identified these: museums, monuments and commemorative practices, memory activist’s projects and locations connected with Soviet repressions. I put these on the metaphorical map of Moldovan memory in Chisinau; they stand for themselves as imagined topographical sites.



## **2.2. Collective memory and realms of memory**

In order to understand better the processes of memory- and narrative-making of deportations and Soviet repressions of 1940s and 1950s in contemporary Moldovan society, two crucial concepts of collective remembering need to be introduced. Since the thesis addresses the question of how does the Moldovan society, a collective, remembers and recalls these events, the concepts explaining collective memory, collective remembering, and memory practices upholding communities' identity are relevant. On the following pages Maurice Halbwachs' 'collective memory' and Pierre Nora's 'realms of memory' will be examined.

### **2.2.1. Maurice Halbwachs' 'collective memory'**

French sociologists and one of the founders of Memory studies Maurice Halbwachs claimed that memories are constructed by social groups and thus memory as such is a social construct. He argued that it is individuals who remember, in the literal, physical sense, but it is social groups who determine what is 'memorable' and also how it will be remembered. In his opinion individuals identify with public events of importance to their group and thus 'remember' a great deal that they have not experienced directly (Halbwachs, 1992). In other words social or collective memory enables people to 'remember' events which had happened before they were even born, or had no chance to experience. That is crucial for nowadays research about the Soviet past, forced deportation respectively. The number of eye-witnesses of the persecutions in 1940s and 1950s has been decreasing, and hence the contemporary society knows the story predominantly through the collective memory. In a case of Moldova and some other former Soviet republics the process of consolidation of collective memory has been affected by contested and competing narratives and memories of the Soviet past of which perception might vary person from person. As it was claimed above, memory and social groups are two intertwined concepts; hence if there are instead of one consolidated identity many social groups, then there are also many memories which can be mutually competitive, exclusive, overlapping or constitutive. The unconsolidated identity and lack of consensus over past events then influence the way the Soviet past is remembered, interpreted

and the memory transmitted. Collective memory is essential term for the study of contemporary Moldovan discourse on dealing with Soviet heritage, and with forced deportations concretely, as it shows us how deeply divided Moldovan society is and how competing the narratives of recent past can become.

### **2.2.2. Pierre Nora's '*lieux de memoire*'**

Another French researcher, Pierre Nora, was a great inspiration for this study. His influential work on *lieux de memoire*, translated into English as sites or realms of memory, is one of the most important concepts utilized in the thesis. Nora defines *lieux de memoire* as: “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (Nora, 1989, p. 17). In other words, *lieux de memoire* is a rather broad concept which can encompass various sites as museums, memorials, archives, cemeteries, and monuments, but also realms as commemorative events, books, flags, songs or festivals and so on. The ‘site’ according to Nora is “one where a community such as a nation, an ethnic group or a party deposits its memories or considers the site to be an integral part of its identity” (Szpociński, 2016). Basically, all practices of which main goal is to uphold the memory of the past can be recognized as sites of memory, whereby the materiality of ‘sites’ is no longer of importance. The ‘sites’ can be understood metaphorically, as all sorts of signs and symbols are potential depositories of the past (ibid). Thinking of history and memory as ‘signs’, is essential. Nora aims to reinterpret the history in symbolic term, and define (France) as a reality that is entirely symbolic. Consequently, the approach is less interested in "what actually happened" than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, and less interested in events themselves than in the construction of the events over time, and also it treats memory not as remembrance but as the overall structure of the past within the presence (Nora, 1999, p. 24). As he noted: “for if we accept the most fundamental purpose of the *lieux de memoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial-just as if gold were the only memory of money-all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that *lieux de memoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramification” (Nora, 1989). Therefore, in the thesis the memory is understood as symbolic structure of the past within the presence that

is communicated through both tangible and intangible sites, and participates on the process of identity- and national narrative-building.

### **2.3. Silence, institutionalised amnesia and recuperative memory**

“The imposed social silence was one of the mechanisms to strengthen terror. [...] Silence intensified feelings of panic, and was adopted by people as a condition for survival. [...] People lived under a permanent double reality, witnessing the disparity between printed news and events they heard of or read between lines” writes Susan Kaiser in her book on post-memory in Argentina (Kaiser, 2005, p. 65). Even though Latin America might seem far away from Eastern Europe, the mechanisms of silence and forced amnesia are rather similar. Kaiser observes that “[...] collective remembering is a communication process that involves the social activity of people actively thinking and talking about events” (2005, p. 66). With imposed silence, the events have limited chance to become part of collective memory, and consequently historical narrative. The silence is a way how to erase the memory, albeit it never succeeds on hundred percent. The topic of silence and its consequences on contemporary memory and memory-making processes is extremely important since the silence on the Soviet terror is still widely-spread. Hand by hand with silence goes institutionalised amnesia, a political approach that has been adopted by many post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe as a way how to deal with the recent past traumas. The inability or more like unwillingness of new political representatives to act and to adopt strict measures towards the past crimes only contributed to the omnipresent amnesia. No clear statements have been expressed, the process of rehabilitation of political prisoners was being halted, no lustration laws have been adopted, and moreover many politicians who had held their positions during the Soviet period, have remained politically active. In this environment it has become extremely difficult to pursue any means of dealing with the traumatic past; to cut the chain and start a new chapter of the history. It will be elaborate on that in the chapter dedicated to memory politics in Republic of Moldova.

The last theory to be mentioned in this subchapter is the recuperative memory. “Recuperative memory is defined as the process of recovering memories of the traumatic past, despite direct or indirect attempts made by the political class in an effort to suppress such memories” (Mitroiu, 2016, p.1). In her article on recuperative memory, Simona Mitroiu draws on the reality of post-Communist Romania. As she notes, this theory becomes especially

applicable in countries which experienced authoritative regimes, or dictatorships resulting in disruption of memory and deprivation of people from possibilities of remembering and commemorating certain experiences. As Mitroiu (2016, p. 4) points out, there are two types of institutions which act at the level of recuperative memory: non-governmental and those financed by the state. In countries with traumatic past and unclear memory politics it is rather typical that the private initiatives precede the governmental ones (and it is like that also in Moldova). Many governmental organizations and institutions directly participated in the recuperative memory process only much later, and after similar projects had been developed by non-governmental organizations or private initiatives such as victims of the Communist regime, former anti-Communist dissidents, intellectuals, civic society organizations, etc., whose ultimate aim was to reintegrate the individual life narratives into the collective memory through various publications, round tables, public discussions, expositions, commemorations, and so on (Mitroiu, 2016, p. 4). That shows that among the means of recuperative memory belong not only public commemorations, official condemnations and apologise, recognition of the suffering, restitution of property and so on, but also personal memories and narratives, diaries and memoirs (ibid). All these might participate in the process of restoration of the traumatic past.

#### **2.4. Post-memory, 'my-their' memory and chosen trauma**

In order to better understand the current discussions regarding memory of Soviet deportations and repressions it is necessary to employ the theory of post-memory. Since majority of the deportees have already passed away (and those who have been still alive mostly witnessed the deportations only as kids) the transmission of the memory and its grasping, interpreting and maintaining has become the domain of new generations – people who do not have the first-generation and first-hand experience but are drawing on the testimonies of real witnesses. As Marianne Hirsch (2008) in her essay *The Generation of Post-memory* defines it: “post-memory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch, 2008, p. 107). However, most of the theoreticians dealing with post-memory examine the term in a

connection with Holocaust as understood in Western Europe. Consequently, the so-called 'second generation' are in most cases descendants of the victims and survivors of the extermination of Jewish population. Hirsh quotes writer Eva Hoffman who states: "The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth"(ibid, p. 103). Drawing on Hirsch, Sasha Colby remarks that, albeit the second- and third-generations are deeply interlinked with the first-generations' memory, and subsequently the memory becomes vital for their sense of identity, it should not be mistaken for the original experience of trauma as lived through by the actual witnesses (Colby, 2018).

I would like to argue that the situation of post-Soviet space, and thus its post-memory is different from the one of Holocaust as perceived in Western Europe. In his famous essay *The Past is Another Country* historian Tony Judt (1992) writes about myth and memory in post-War Europe. He states that after the Second World War the Western Europeans "settled for some twenty-five years into a comforting collective amnesia" (Judt, 1992, p. 95), and only in the beginning of 60s initiated by trial with former Nazi officials, a new debate over the uneasy past was launched due to the pressure of young generations asking 'embarrassing questions' (ibid, p. 97). Generally speaking, the "second generation" grew up, and began to demand answers. Nevertheless, this was definitely not the case in Eastern bloc. Although the memory of atrocities of fascism and Nazism was awarded with great attention (the myth of Great Patriotic War), many important parts of the story were omitted. Counter-memories which would offer more pluralistic vision on the official narrative were suppressed, and also the memory of Soviet crimes such as deportations, mass killings, collectivisation, and so on was obviously repressed. While the Western Europe was able to start dealing with its 'spectres of pasts' as soon as the second generation, there was much bigger gap in the Eastern part of the continent. Crimes of Great terror in 1920s and 1930s have started to be researched only after the fall of Soviet Union, similarly as deportations and other atrocities. The transmission of memory was violently disrupted, because people who experienced deportations or other means of repressions were often afraid to speak up about their traumatic past, and the memory was often not transmitted to the next generation. That means that the second-generation was primarily not the one referring about their parent's destinies; these were perhaps their grandsons and granddaughters or even the grand-grandchildren. As it was already mentioned, the boom of studies of Soviet regime in Moldova has come only after the governmental change in 2010; however, people who were adults in times of Stalinist repressions had mostly already passed away by then, therefore if one speaks with survivors of

deportations nowadays, these are people who were dragged to Siberia as little kids or who were born there. I argue that the post-memory of Stalinist repressions has to be examined with this condition on mind.

Another concepts which should be elaborated on is so-called ‘my-their’ memory. As it will be further argued in the chapter dealing with memory activists, the emotions and personal connections with the life stories and testimonies might get extremely strong, and sometimes even acts as a traumatic experience on its own. When speaking about people dealing with the testimonies, about those collecting and recording the memories of great human suffering, it should be realized that it is difficult not only for the witnesses, but also for the person listening to these stories (Chaitin&Steinberg, 2013). As Dori Laub (1992) argued: [...] “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant, and a co-owner of the traumatic event; through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself [...] [he] comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels”. The impact of such a story on its listener thus might evolve in what Chaitin&Steinberg (2013) call ‘my-their’ memory. According to them “My-their memory images, which appear to be personal ‘memories’, are defined as images and experiences of the past trauma that either the younger generations could not have had, since they were born after the persecution ended, or because they experienced the trauma when they were extremely young (for example when they were babies or young toddlers), and thus, the chances that they actually remember the event are extremely slim” (Chaitin&Steinberg, 2013, p. 35). “They are reconstruction memories, based on interpretation of memories of their elders, and extensive exposure to collective memories [...] memory images are conceptualized as being influenced by autobiographical memories of parents/grandparents and by collective memories,” (ibid). What makes it interesting is the emotional investment. Quite often could be encountered that the bearers of ‘my-their’ memory are highly emotional and personal; sometimes they perceive the events even more personally than the real witnesses. As a closely connected with this theory comes the concept of ‘chosen trauma’. Chosen trauma is “[...] a large group’s mental representation of a historical event that resulted in collective feelings of helplessness, victimization, shame, and humiliation at the hands of ‘others,’ and typically involves drastic losses of people, land, prestige, and dignity” (Volkan, 2006, p. 173). According to Volkan, the victims of the persecutions or repressions transmit the deep feeling of trauma on the next generation, which is expected to complete the shared mourning process. If the next generation does not have ability or the power to complete the process, it may delegate this task to

following generations. As a result, this process keeps the ancestor's traumatic event as a significant element in the new-generations' group identity (Chaitin&Steinberg, 2013, p. 34).

## **2.5. Antagonistic memory and cosmopolitan memory**

The struggle between antagonistic memory (or sometimes also referred to as victimhood nationalism) and cosmopolitan memory is deeply inscribed in current debates on Soviet past and its heritage. These two approaches towards memory stand in opposition with each other; first of them as a specific form of nationalism that rests on the memory of collective suffering with clearly stated dichotomy of victims and victimizer (Lim, 2010), and the latter as a way of understanding memory as inheritably pluralistic which tries to approach it in an inclusive and non-discriminating way emphasizing mourning, regret and reflexivity (Bul&Hansen, 2016). As Jie-Hyun Lim argued in her article on victimhood nationalism "[...] the trajectories of contested memories of victimhood are very often tainted by the nationalist appropriation of global accountability. Hereditary victimhood has been transformed into historical culture, be it on the level of consciousness or of sub-consciousness, and it has fed a specific form of nationalism that rests on the memory of collective suffering. [...] I would like to suggest the term 'victimhood nationalism' as a working hypothesis to explain the competing national memories for the position of collective victims in the memory wars [...]. 'Victimhood nationalism' is complete when victimhood becomes hereditary in the national historical imagination. [...] A transnational history of 'coming to terms with past' would show that victimhood nationalism has been a major obstacle to any historical reconciliation effort" (Lim, 2010, p. 138-139). The image of Moldova as a field of suffering and humiliation is embedded in historical consciousness of many people, be it pan-Romanianists or pro-Russians although both camps acknowledge different victimizers. Generally speaking, victimhood nationalism serves as an obstacle in a process of creation of modern Moldovan identity.

Unlike victimhood nationalism, cosmopolitan memory aims to bridge over local smaller and often ethnic- or ideology-based memories, and turn them into some more pluralistic whole, and offer a whole-scale memory without discriminating and neglecting particular memories. Cosmopolitan memory was assumed to bring a solution to overcoming agonistic and competing national narratives of victimhood. As Nathan Sznaider argues "A cosmopolitan memory of the past emerges from the conscious and deliberate inclusion of the

Other's suffering - not from the idea of some community of fate, inspired by mythical delusions and serving to construct some false historical continuity. New moral and political fields of action and responsibility emerge from communication and interdependence. [...] it is a political space that cannot exist without pluralism. Moreover, when cosmopolitanism is rooted in historical experience, it is practically the equivalent of pluralism [...] ” (Sznajder, 2013, p. 75). Victimhood nationalism found a fertile soil in post-Communist countries of which ethnic composition has changed radically since the end of the Second World War resulting in homogenisation of once truly cosmopolitan societies and cities. Particularly countries of Central Eastern Europe were struck heavily – for example Poland of which inhabitants consisted before the war of only 60% of Poles became in the aftermath of the Second World War very homogeneous state with around 90% of Poles, and the same counts for post-War Czechoslovakia which lost due to the expulsion of Sudeten Germans and Hungarians more than 3 millions of people. The situation was even worse in territory of Soviet Union which American Historian Timothy Snyder (2012) named as ‘Bloodlands’ due to the unimaginable suffering of local populations. Together with the loss of ethnic diversity the cosmopolitan memory or the memory of ‘lost others’ practically disappeared. Literary researcher and memory scholar Barbara Tornquist-Plewa and col. (2016) contributed to research of cosmopolitan memory with the project *Remembering Ethnic Cleansing and Lost Cultural Diversity in Eastern, Central and South-eastern Europe*. This research dealt with memory of once-cosmopolitan cities which lost due to Second World War, ethnic cleansings and post-war repressions their cosmopolitan and multicultural form. Due to its uneasy history and resulting unwillingness of many people to speak about it supported by institutionalised silence on these topics the inhabitants of such a places face serious challenge of how to cope with the difficult past (Tornquist-Plewa, 2016). Tornquist-Plewa (2016, p. 139) notes on this matter that many sites which would remind current inhabitants of the stories of their former neighbours were neglected, transformed, appropriated or even destroyed. For example inscriptions in foreign languages, or street names were erased and changed, monuments or cemeteries left to decay and so on. As Tornquist-Plewa argues the easiest situation to neglect and forget the heritage of ‘lost others’ was in extensively destroyed cities such as Wrocław or Zadar, and I would obviously also add Chisinau. As it will be elaborated later, the loss of cosmopolitan memory influenced considerably Moldovan capital and its memory. At the same time however the revival of cosmopolitan memory might serve as a bridge over the divided society which cannot agree on who to remember and who to forget.



### 3. Moldova as mnemonic field

A commemorative stone with rather unusual inscription was erected in 2010 in front of the House of Government in Moldova's capital Chisinau: *In this place will stand a monument to victims of Soviet occupation and communist totalitarian regime.*<sup>3</sup> It has been nine years since this temporary stone was revealed, and nothing indicates that the proposed monument would be erected anytime soon. This place located in the very centre of capital serves, to some extent, as an indicator of changes in Moldovan memory politics, and a simple glance in that direction can reveal a lot about the nature of currently ruling regime.

Indeed, this spot has witnessed some impressive metamorphoses. During Tsarist period it accommodated statue of Tsar Alexander I. who annexed Bessarabia, and united it with Russia. After the First World War Bessarabia become part of Romania, and Tsar was substituted with Romanian king Ferdinand I. However, King Ferdinand did not stay there for a long; after the first occupation of Bessarabia by Soviet Union in 1940, he was taken down and replaced by Grigori Kotovskii – Soviet general and politician. In 1941 Soviets were ousted from Bessarabia by joint coalition of Romanians and Germans, and this political and power shift resulted in another moving of monuments: Kotovskii lost his spot for national hero King Ștefan cel Mare. When Soviets returned in 1944 King Ștefan had to move into nearby park to make space for a statue of Vladimir Lenin who stayed there until the dissolution of Soviet Union.

Nowadays, on this very prominent place, there stands a stone – silent witness of indecisiveness, lack of unity and hesitance. It is somehow symptomatic for the debates on recent past among Moldovan society, and illustrates how difficult topic it remains to be. Moldova is indeed peculiar case of fragmented, contested and competing memory, identity and narratives. Lack of consensus is characteristic for Moldovan society, and inability to agree on any common interpretation makes it difficult to successfully deal with the recent historical traumas, as the society remains divided between several opinion groups based on different interpretation of the past and identity. Moldova has experienced, similarly as other countries of the former Soviet Union, eventful 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, any common narrative that would explain the recent past, and thus offer a guideline on how to tackle with uneasy history is missing: the society is so fragmented, the past so contested, and narratives so competing that the idea of reaching any consensus is almost from the world of fairy-tales.

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<sup>3</sup> In original (Romanian): In acest loc va fi amplasat monumentul de victimelor ocupatiei sovietice și ale regimului totalitar communist

On the following pages the reasons behind the missing collective memory and common narrative will be discussed. This overview serves as a background for better understanding of the following chapter dealing with memoryscape of forced deportations in Chisinau.

### **3.1. History of Moldova**

History of Moldova is in a way history of one European periphery. For most of its existence it has been on the edge of interest, marginalized and ruled over by stronger neighbours. Moldova counted as least developed European region of both Russian Empire and Soviet Union, and also during the inter-war period it was considered as the most backward part of Romania. I argue that the lack of consent on the collective story or national narrative originates in the peripheral character of Moldova, and its history that has always been forged by stronger and bigger neighbours leaving only limited agency for local inhabitants.

The first state formation on the territory of contemporary Moldova was called Principality of Moldavia, and was established in early 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Soon it became one of the leading powers in the region together with Wallachians, and grew strong under the rule of two kings – Alexandru cel Bun (1400-1432) and Stefan cel Mare (1457-1504). However, the kingdom had an uneasy position between Poles, Hungarians, Russians and Ottomans, who all sought to expand their territory. After Stefan's death, the kingdom fell under the rule of Ottomans, and although it kept the status of vassal state, and thus never became integral part of the Ottoman Empire, it lost most of its power, and gradually became more and more peripheral. After the unsuccessful anti-Ottoman uprising in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century lead by Dimitrie Cantemir the more or less autonomous kingdom lost many of its privileges, and its administration was handed over to Greek noblemen who accelerated the stagnation. In that time both Russian and Habsburg Empires were expanding, while the power of Ottomans was declining. In 1775 part of Moldavia – Northern Bukovina – fell to Austrians. After the Turkish-Russian War in 1812 the eastern part of Moldavia was ceded to Tsarist Russia. That is when it got its name Bessarabia (King, 2000, p. 14-18). The first years of Russian rule over Bessarabia were marked by great hopes for broad autonomy, however, these proved to be false ones. Tsar introduced reforms which aimed to strengthen the central control; one of them was for example proclaiming Russian as official language. Russification indeed took place; however the rural population was not affected very strongly (King, 2000, p. 21). On the other

hand, the elites and city dwellers were either Russians themselves or russified Moldovans or Jews. Bessarabia remained the most backward European region of Tsarist Russia (King, 2000, p. 23). It is important to note that the development of Western part of Moldavia, which was not annexed by Russia, differed significantly from the processes in Bessarabia. Shortly, Bessarabia had almost no impact on creation of United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which later became Romania. Bessarabia, albeit inhabited by the same ethnic group speaking the same language, had different historical development, and thus different historical experience, respectively identity (Petrescu, 2001, p. 154-155).

The events surrounding the First World War and Bolshevik revolution affected Bessarabia considerably. The chaos which broke out in Russia after Bolsheviks seized the power in 1917, resulted in autonomy or even independence calls from several social and military organizations. Indeed, initially Bessarabia planned to remain within Russia as an autonomous region; however, this plan failed as Romanians took advantage of the turmoil, and sent their army to Bessarabia to fight Bolsheviks. The situation was chaotic; some were more than happy about Romanian presence, but some were far less enthusiastic, and considered it as interference. Nevertheless, the situation resulted in unification of Bessarabia with Romania, which announced the end of any ideas of independence or remaining within Russia (King, 2000, p. 34-35). Bessarabia became a region in Greater Romania, but in fact, it remained as peripheral as it used to be during the tsarist period. Moreover, there were many concerns and disputes over the legitimacy of the unification. Russia, which transformed into Soviet Union meanwhile, never recognised the unification, and claimed that Romania occupies its territory. Western powers were also quite reserved on the topic, and the issue of Bessarabia kept appearing on the table during diplomatic meetings throughout the inter-war period (King, 2000, p. 38-39).

Nevertheless, the situation in the region improved during Romanian period (1918-1940): social and economic reforms were introduced, main streets in Chisinau were finally paved, government invested into infrastructure and so on. Yet, local Bessarabians complained a lot about the way Romanians behaved towards the newly annexed territory. The lack of respect and general marginalization of Bessarabians made many angry and disappointed with the new rulers. Heavily corrupted Romanian officials and cumbersome administration did not successfully persuade locals that Romanian rule would be so much better than the Russian one. Moreover, Romanian approach towards minorities was not very friendly; most of Russian or Ukrainian functionaries and teachers were forced to leave their jobs, and schools,

libraries and church were romanized. This was grist to the mill to anti-Romanian sentiment (King, 2000, p. 41-47).

When the Second World War broke out, Romania was obviously heavily influenced. Especially the signature of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact forced Romania on giving up Bessarabia, which was then annexed by Soviet Union. After the annexation Soviets began to build a new social and economic order which would follow the socialist pattern. Communist reforms were initiated, and the first wave of forced deportation and political repressions followed soon. However, Romanians did not want to accept the loss of its territory and joined forces with Nazi Germany in order to get Bessarabia back. They did succeed; nevertheless, the Romanian-German rule was marked with pogroms, mass killings of Jews and persecutions (Dumitru, 2008, p. 302). When Soviets returned in 1944 and annexed Bessarabia again, some greeted them as liberators.

After the Second World War it was obvious that Bessarabia will remain within Soviet Union. Yet, there was a long way ahead for the newly formed Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in breaking through to socialism. During the Stalinist collectivization campaign (1946-1950) many people, regardless their ethnicity, were deported, persecuted, imprisoned, or fell victim to famine. In later 50s the situation calmed down, and majority of deported people was rehabilitated and allowed to return back to MSSR (King, 2000, p. 95-98). Generally speaking, since the end of Stalin era and connected major social, political and market changes, Moldova has basically continued in its tradition of being periphery. Not many remarkable events happened: the system was largely a copy of those in other Soviet republics, agricultural production was major part of Moldovan economy, and the percent of rural population was second higher in the whole Soviet Union. It even stayed on the edge of interest of foreign Sovietologists (King, 2000, p. 98-99). Due to its long experience with Russian dominance, Sovietization of Bessarabia was easier than in other regions as for example in Baltic countries or Western Ukraine. During the Soviet period the ethnic composition changed considerably: by the census in 1989 only 64, 5% of the population of Moldova were Moldovans. There was a rapid increase of Russian and Ukrainian population – 13, 8% and 13 % respectively. The culture and language got russified, however since there has never been any strong national identity among Moldovans it did not cause serious animosities as it did for example in the Baltic countries (King, 2000, p. 100-101).

In 1980s it was already very clear that Soviet Union has some serious economic troubles. The proposed answer to these troubles – *perestroika* and *glasnost* – resonated also in MSSR. The political thaw resulted in series of mass demonstrations which called for

recognition of Moldovan language as *limba de stat* (state language) and its transformation back to Latin script. The main opposition powers organized in newly established Popular Front of Moldova were strongly pro-Romanian and aimed to reach recognition of the nation as Romanian and the language as Romanian language (Zdaniuk, 2014, p. 137). Emphasizing belonging to Romania, Romanian language and culture inevitably launched a kind of nervousness in Transnistria and Gagauzia – both regions with majority of non-Moldovan population - which later resulted in their separation from the rest of the country (in case of Gagauzia only in autonomous region) (ibid, p. 137).

The first democratic elections were held in February and March 1990 and Moldova finally declared its independence on 27 August 1991. However, the Popular Front did not hold any majority in parliament, and also at least 40% of inhabitants of MSSR were non-Romanian speakers (Negură, 2016, p. 544). In popular election following the gain of independence Popular Front and other forces lobbying for reunification were defeated which sent a clear signal of mood in the society (ibid, p. 544). In 1992 Moldova introduced a market economy, liberalizing prices, which resulted in huge inflation and consequent economic crisis which lasted till 2001. In the years following the independence the pro-Romanian leadership was substituted for more moderate governments and the idea of unification with Romania has begun slowly disappearing. The real shift in Moldovan post-Soviet development came with the year 2001 when Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova gained 71 of the 101 parliament seats, and elected Vladimir Voronin as the country's new president. By this Moldova became the first post-Soviet republic which re-elected non-reformed communist party (Negură, 2016). Voronin's era was marked by strengthening ties with Russia and emphasizing 'Moldovanness' instead of 'Romanianness'. Government also planned to introduce Russian as a second state language or substitute school history books for new ones. These proposals met with opposition and after popular demonstrations these plans got annulled (ibid). General election in 2005 resulted similarly and communists won again. The same scenario repeated in next election in 2009.

However, the 2009 election turned out to be different. After another victory of Party of Communists, opposition called the results manipulated and protested it. Mass demonstrations were organised and people took streets of Chisinau shouting anti-Communist and pro-Romanian slogans. These demonstrations are also known as 'Twitter revolution', as people used social network Twitter to organise the protests (Negru, 2010). Eventually, the protests got out of hand and turned into riots. Some says that Communist Party employed agent provocateurs in order to turn the more or less peaceful protests into violent riot, however no

evidences have been ever found. The protests culminated on 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2009 when Presidential palace and House of Government were looted and damaged. Several people got hurt, hundreds got arrested and three people died (Negru, 2010). The political situation after the so-called revolution remained unstable. Parliament failed to elect new president and as a result new elections were held. Consequently, Communists lost power to the Alliance for European Integration. Pro-European coalitions have been ruling in Moldova since.

### **3.2. Competing identities: Romanianness vs. Moldovanism**

As it was mentioned above, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union all the successor states had to somehow deal with the Soviet legacy, and find their ways in the new post-Soviet world. The Soviet heritage stretched deeply into memory and identity of former Soviet citizens, and it proved to be much easier to introduce economic and political reforms than to change people's mind-sets. In Moldova particularly this has turned out to be more complicated than anybody expected. Being sandwiched between Russian/Soviet and Romanian identity projects Moldovan sense of belonging has been constantly influenced by its stronger "older brothers", and that has left only limited agency for Moldovans on deciding their own identity. As a result Moldovans have been questioning the existence of their own nation and legitimacy of independent Republic of Moldova. While some claims that Moldovans belong to Romanian family, and the only reason for existence of separate state and nation is Soviet violent intervention and social engineering, others are convinced that there are actual reasons behind independent Moldova and separate Moldovan nation (King, 1994).

The unification with Romania in 1918 and following integration of overwhelmingly rural, illiterate and nationally unconscious Bessarabians into 'Romanian nation' did not go as smoothly as in other regions of Romanian kingdom. The peasant population of Bessarabia was indifferent to Romanianness and felt little kinship to people on the other side of Prut River. In their understanding they have been 'Moldovans' since time immemorial which, however, by no means refers to later Soviet concept of Moldovanism as national identity totally distinct from Romanians, but rather to Moldovans as inhabitants of historical region of Moldova (Petrescu, 2001, p. 154). As it was already mentioned, due to being part of Tsarist Russia, Bessarabia has missed crucial moments of modern Romanian nation building processes; it did not participate on Romanian national awakening, emergence of Romanian independent policy, and creation of Romanian kingdom, and the concept of Romanianness as

such. Also, events and personas so important for Romanian identity were alien to Bessarabians, and consequently the Romanian government struggled significantly to 'teach' Bessarabians their new Romanian identity. Moreover, the replacement of local Tsarist government with Romanian centralised government was by many not perceived as a change for better, as the Tsarist system offered much broader autonomy. Generally speaking, Bessarabia remained underdeveloped and peripheral territory of Greater Romania, similar position which had occupied within the Tsarist Russia, leaving many Bessarabians disappointed and unsatisfied (King, 1994). There was, therefore, fertile soil for Russian sentiment. When Soviet troops entered Bessarabia in 1940, only minority of people – mostly elites and intelligentsia – fled to Romania while majority remained home expecting the return of old days. Even after it became very clear that the Soviet Union differs from Tsarist Russia, and with the launch of first wave of deportations, the number of refugees did not increase drastically (Petrescu, 2001, p. 164).

Once Bessarabia became part of Soviet Union and changed its name to Moldavian SSR its inhabitants were exposed to Sovietisation and effort to create new Soviet identity. The quotation 'national in form, but socialist in content' sums up the approach towards Soviet republics quite well; the 'form' of republic remained national – the territory was named after the predominant ethnic, authorized folklore and traditional culture were maintained and heavily used in propaganda, separate political and educational institutions were introduced etc., but at the same time heavy russification policy was enacted including installation of Russian language as 'language of interethnic communication' which basically meant that anybody willing to somehow participate in Soviet society was forced to learn it. Also, many Russians were invited to settle down in the new republics, and these Russian 'specialists' were installed into superior work positions (Gorenburg, 2006). Yet, it differed significantly country by country: for example, Russians in Baltic countries did predominantly jobs in heavy industry, while Russian migrants in Central Asia or in Moldova and Caucasus consisted mostly of educated people who got installed into positions as teachers, doctors, officers, politicians and so on (Levita & Loiberg, 2004). Almost any notions or acts depicting the pre-Soviet days within Greater Romania in a positive way were considered as nationalism, and therefore persecuted. Soviet ideology was drawing on internationalism and equality between all nations, and nationalism was strictly prohibited. The identity policy in Soviet Union was therefore rather ambiguity; on one hand it indeed suppressed local cultures and identities but on the other hand it also helped them to emerge and strengthen. Nevertheless, this process was controlled by Moscow, and heavily intertwined with Russification.

Since the very beginning of Bessarabian incorporation into Soviet Union, new state officials were enforcing Soviet ideology on lives of Bessarabians. Deportations and repressions have drastically changed the ethno-cultural landscape of Bessarabia, and the new Moldovan Soviet identity that would differentiate Moldavian SSR from neighbouring Romania, and break all the links between them on cultural, historical, and also language levels was introduced. Soviet Union had indeed solid ground for emphasizing its historical ties with Bessarabia at the expense of Romania. Another way how to alienate MSSR and Romania was on the basis of language. Soviet scholars claimed that Romanian and Moldovan are completely separate east-Romance languages. Introduction of Cyrillic script should have emphasized the fundamental differences between them (King, 1994). For example, Moldovan people's commissar Pavel Chior claimed that language standardization of Romanian was created on the basis of bourgeois approach towards the language, and thus it was not possible to apply it on Moldovan rural peasant population (King, 1999, p. 124).

Inhabitants of Moldova has been exposed to identity and national-building project from both Russian/Soviet and Romanian sides. As Charles King (2000, p. 230) argued: "Cultural engineers, whether Russian, Romanian, or Soviet, went about their task with little regard for the existing cultural practices or political will of their target populations. 'The people' have been both the source and the object of the competing visions of the nation promoted over the past two centuries." Both of the identity projects have been to some extent successful leaving space for future disputes and ambiguities over the identity that plays crucial role in collective story and narrative-making of the past. In the following chapter we will look closer to the politics of memory and the endeavour of creating the collective story.

### **3.3. The politics of memory in Republic of Moldova**

As Jan-Werner Müller (2004, p. 18) noted "meaningful and coherent stories are not only important for individuals but also for communities. They inform their members where they come from and what binds them to their neighbours. An officially acknowledged story of the past moreover can restore historical injustices by acknowledging the victims and condemning the perpetrators and helps to recover a community's identity". Collective story secures social cohesion and provides guidance in life. Without meaningful story, painful historical experiences are a burden in the present, and are doomed to determine the future because one is not able to live fully in the present (Kattago, 2012).



After the gain of independence in 1991 Moldova, similarly as other Central Eastern European new democracies, stood in front of serious question: how to interpret the former regime? How to grasp it and how to deal with its heritage? While some deployed more strict politics as barring former communist leaders from holding any public office, lustrations, restitution of property to its original owners, rehabilitation of political prisoners, opening up secret files and so on, other were more hesitating on the approach towards the communist past. Narratives of the Soviet past might be contradictory, and differs not only country by country but also region by region or even family by family, and while some might perceive Soviet period as a time of unfreedom, there is definitely many of those whose perception is completely opposite. Every country of former Soviet bloc had to develop its own politics of memory or in other words historical memory. The concept of 'historical memory', or 'the politics of memory', refers to the ways in which groups, collectivities, and nations construct and identify with particular narratives about historical periods or events (Hite, 2012). Public notions of history are formed by the dominant sector of society through public commemorations, educational system, mass media, popular culture etc. The past is moulded to suit present dominant interests. Commemorative narratives highlight common past and shared destiny, constructed versions of the past aim to establish social cohesion legitimizing authority and socialising society.

In Republic of Moldova emerged serious questions regarding historical memory. Due to various reasons described above there has not been created any common narrative – or in different words - commonly accepted historical memory that would explain the Soviet past and set a new direction for country's development. The criticism of Soviet period is perceived by many (Russian speakers in particular) as Russophobe and anti-Russian campaign while others see it as legitimate criticism. Also the official level of memory-making has gone through serious turbulences. Unlike in Baltic countries which took almost immediately pro-Western direction, and were therefore early recognized and supported predominantly by United States of America and Nordic countries (especially Finland), Moldova struggled significantly more to get international recognition and support, mostly because of its unclear leanings (Negură, 2016, p. 546). The division of country between pan-Romanians, centrists, pro-Russians, and pro-Soviets made it difficult for foreign observers to predict any future development.

Already the first president of newly independent Republic of Moldova Mircea Snegur has started the path of hardly predictable politics. Being himself strong supporter of national movement during late 1980s and early 1990s, he initially acted in favour of warm relations

with Romania (King, 2000, p. 160). However he left his rather pro-Romanian approach quite soon, becoming defender of Moldovanism. Yet, to describe his politics, he was rather pragmatic and opportunistic than highly ideological figure. Also, his shift from Romaniannism to Moldovanism was partly caused by Romanian rather reserved approach towards Moldova and its calls for reunification. Under his presidency the language laws from 1989 were suspended and the official language was again labelled as Moldovan. Also the newly adopted national anthem 'Romania, Awake!' which Moldova shared with Romania was substituted with poem 'Our Language' written by poet Alexei Mateevici (ibid, p. 159). This shift towards Moldovanism rather than pan-Romanism met with serious opposition from Moldovan intelligentsia. The Moldovan intellectual elites consisted almost exclusively of pro-Romanians or pan-Romanians, and those who opposed this approach and leaned to Moldovanism have mostly left Chisinau and settled down in Transnistria with some getting affiliated with the university in Tiraspol. The political situation and country's orientation remained unclear also during the rule of Snegur's successor Petru Lucinschi (ibid, p. 161-162). The never ending debates on the character of the republic naturally also affected the process of dealing with the recent past and its traumas, or in other words the process of creation of national narrative.

In 2001 Communists led by Vladimir Voronin won the election and launched several reforms concerning politics of memory. Their ultimate aim was to "defend the right of the Moldovan people to their historical name *moldoveni*, and to the name of their native language *limba moldoveneasca*, to their own glorious history and spiritual uniqueness" (March, 2007, p. 607). They introduced an intention to substitute history school books 'History of Romanians' with 'History of Moldova' which would in their opinion better represent Moldovan 'right to its own history' (ibid, p. 607). Communists argued that 'History of Romanians' practically omits Moldovans and their unique historical trajectories, and emphasizes historical events of Romania. They were convinced that Moldovans actually gained the national consciousness way earlier than Romanians. They also argued that while the textbook condemns Soviet period as the time of ultimate evil, it keeps silent about atrocities perpetrated by Romanians during the Second World War alongside Nazis and especially their role in Holocaust and mass killings on the territory of Bessarabia. In the new textbook Soviet period was perceived in predominantly positive way, and the Stalinist era including famine, collectivisation and forced deportations did not receive much attention or critical consideration (ibid, p. 608). However, this met with serious protests that were even strengthened by the idea of introducing Russian as second state language. The fear of

wholesome re-Sovietisation made people to take streets of Chisinau. The era of Communist rule (2001-2009) witnessed also an effort of re-introducing Moldovanism in the realm of linguistics. In order to stress the distinctiveness of both languages Moldovan-Romanian dictionary was released. This attempt was so heavily laughed at that even Communist representatives later denied the need for such a title (ibid, p. 611).

The overall positive and nostalgic approach of Communist governments towards Soviet past resulted in sort of ‘war’ with local historians and intellectual elites. As it was mentioned, majority of intelligentsia took the pro-Romanian side, and therefore the steps of Communists strongly resonated amongst them. From many interviews I conducted with Moldovan historians the result was unequivocal: they perceived the era of Voronin’s governments as a time of struggles between academia and official politics. Not only was the environment not encouraging in a realm of financial support, the regime also made it difficult to get to certain kinds of information which were necessary for scholarly work. Already during the Snegur’s era some of the archives, concretely archive of Communist Party and KGB/NKVD archive, were closed for public and researchers, which made the research way harder. It is not coincidence that serious academic bodies dealing with Soviet past as for example The Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of the Republic of Moldova and Centre for Study of Totalitarian Regimes & Cold War were established only under the new post 2009 ‘revolution’ government. However, these research centres or bodies lack funding and thus their opportunities to shape and contribute to public discussions are limited.

Similarly as the academics, also the victims of Soviet-era repressions – concretely those of forced Soviet deportations – have experienced “cold war” with the establishment. The status of formerly deported or persecuted has not been clear in post-Soviet Moldova. The topic of formerly deported was for a long time marginalised; they were omitted from public discussions and their suffering under Soviet regime did not get any broader attention. It did not fit into the officially pronounced policy of Voronin’s government and thus the official approach was rather reserved. Many claimed that they still felt like ‘vragi naroda’ (= enemies of the state) as they did during the Soviet period. While other countries of former Eastern bloc have launched programs for compensating victims of Communist regime, and granted them with full rehabilitation, deported Moldovans could have only dreamt about this. They felt like nobody wants to hear their stories, nobody cares and, in general, it would have been better if they would have just remained silent. The shift in discourse came, again, with the political change in 2009 when the era of Communist rule was substituted with new government

represented by coalition of pro-European parties called Alliance for European Integration lead by Prime Minister Vlad Filat of Liberal Democratic Party. This government tried to be in opposition with Communists, and started more pro-European direction. As a consequence the approach towards Soviet past and by extension towards the deportees had to be reconceptualised to meet a newly proposed trajectory of Filat's government. One of the actions of the new government was establishing of 6<sup>th</sup> of July as official commemorative day. They also had ambitious plan to put a monument commemorating Soviet deportations and repressions to every city and village in Moldova. This plan did not succeed, but it was a first sign that times might change. From that time also dates the installation of the Memorial to Victims of Stalinist Repression revealed in Chisinau in front of Main Train Station in 2013. This place has eventually become the leading venue for commemorative actions especially on 6<sup>th</sup> of July, when politicians gather and lay flowers and hold speeches. Nevertheless, the era of Liberal party with their radical change in attitude did not last long. As far as the Democratic Party of Moldova took power in 2014 the approach shifted again. Democratic Party profiled itself as populist and as such it could not have afforded to have any strong opinion on historical events, as that might have discouraged potential voters. They still kept holding the commemorative days and lay flowers but out of pure necessity; the government did not intend to anyhow pursue the discussion or launch any new discourse. It has become just a gesture, mostly before elections or important events, which should show to more politically consciousness Moldovans that the politicians care. However, many of deportees and people involved in the research perceive it as a solely populist act done only in order to catch more potential voters.

The last important topic to be mentioned in this chapter is problematics of so-called 'victim competition'. Moldova was affected by Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and thus has experienced 'double occupation' – Soviet and Nazi. When Soviets occupied Bessarabia in 1940 they launched persecutions and deportations of people allegedly dangerous for the Soviet regime such as local intelligentsia and local leaders, people connected with Romanian period, kulaks, and clerics and so on. After joined armies of Nazi Germany and Antonescu's Romania took over Bessarabia in 1941 another round of persecutions and mass murdering started. This time the most vulnerable people were Jews, minorities (as for example Gagauz where the narrative of Romanian occupation which caused sort of genocide against their people still influences the contemporary debates) and sympathiser of Bolsheviks. Romanians alongside Nazis participated on Holocaust and mass murdering of local Bessarabian population. During 1941-1944 at least 130 000 Jews were killed by Romanians solely in

Transnistria and the whole number of perished Jews in Moldova reached 250 000 (Solonari, 2002, p. 435). When Nazis and Romanians were forced out, Soviets continued in deportations and repressions of 'enemies of the state'. The discussions on the victims of these occupations illustrate the division of Moldovan society. The research of both is heavily politicised; the topic of Holocaust perpetrated by Romanians with significant help of local Bessarabians is considered as anti-Romanian sentiment and, similarly, the deportations serve as a favourite theme for anti-Russians. It is not a coincidence that people involved in the research of Holocaust are mostly Russian-speaking researchers while ethnic Moldovans (Romanians) lean to research deportations. The role plays also the inherited Soviet attitude which does not see Jews as a separate group of victims of war (Sineaeva-Pankowska, 2014, p. 3), and still present antisemitism and the image of Jews as communists spread especially amongst older generation of pan-Romanian researchers who have adopted the Romanian nationalistic view of the Second World War events (Tartakovsky, 2008, p. 221). Jews were more sympathetic with communist regime, which leads some researchers to assumption that Jews were collaborators and therefore kind of deserved their destiny. Moreover, as Michael Shafir (2004, p. 52) noted the most widespread type of Holocaust denial in Eastern Europe is selective negation. It does "not deny the Holocaust as having taken place elsewhere, but excludes any participation by members of one's own nation or seriously minimizes it." That is case of Moldova, where Holocaust does not occupy an important place in the Second World War narrative due to uneasy role of Romanians and local population, and also because of the heritage of Soviet historiography. As a result Jewish culture is almost unknown in contemporary Moldova even though Jewish population used to play an important role in cultural life of the territory and Chisinau ghetto with its 70 synagogues was one of the biggest in Eastern Europe (Sineaeva-Pankowska, 2014, p. 6).

### **3.4. Chisinau: The least known European capital**

As Maria Axenti states in her paper analysing transformations of Chisinau's city centre: "The history of Moldova and its contrasting political regimes have strongly impacted Chisinau, especially its centre. The centre [...] was used and re-used by each overtaking power. Nowadays, the centre of Chisinau thus bears the marks of all previous times, forming

an eclectic landscape that the citizens of the young independent country are still conceptualizing” (2017, p. 121). Indeed, if one looks at the old photographs of inter-war or even 19<sup>th</sup> Century Chisinau, and compares it with contemporary state-of-arts, she would hardly say it is the same city. Moldovan capital changed significantly not only during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but also in the years following the independence in 1991. The Second World War, Communist utopic dreams, and post-Soviet wild capitalism were the main fuels for the rampant transformation of the city. As a result of the turbulent history, Chisinau has lost many of its valuable historical sites, and, unfortunately, the process has been continuing even nowadays due to poor heritage protection, corruption and money-oriented approach of local developers. A little which has remained from old Chisinau has been constantly threatened by new developments which do not take into consideration their surroundings and the value of the location; a story so familiar also from other post-Soviet cities.

Chisinau became a capital in the aftermath of Turkish-Russian war in 1812, when the Ottomans-ruled territory was conquered and annexed by Tsarist Russia. Chisinau was in that time only a small town inhabited by approximately 7 000 of people, but the Russian decision to make it capital of newly established Bessarabia oblast (later guberniya) transformed it into new centre of the country. Russian officials developed in 1843 a generous master plan for the city. They decided to build a whole new quarter that would serve as an administrative, religious and representative centre of the new capital. The plan resulted in construction of so-called ‘Upper Town’, new city centre with well-planned structure and narrow wide streets that was in a sharp contrast with older and organically developed ‘Lower Town’ with middle-aged-style crooked streets and more village-like character (Axenti, 2017). Even nowadays some differences between these two Chisinau’s quarters could be seen, although the history has hit hard the character of Moldovan capital. When the Tsarist Russia ceased to exist and Bessarabia become part of Romanian Kingdom, Chisinau experienced another significant changes, as the new Romanian regime tried hard to get rid of Slavic influences. Although Mother Russia as a protector of Bessarabians was substituted with embracing arms of Mother Romania, Romanians confined themselves only to ideological changes such as renaming streets or replacing statues and monuments, and the city structure remained more or less untouched (ibid).

The real disaster for Chisinau came with the beginning of the Second World War. In 1940 in the aftermath of Molotov-Ribbentrop pact Romanian army was forced to withdraw from Bessarabia that went back to the hands of Russians – this times Soviets. However, Romanians supported by Nazi Germany were back in 1941 and during the heavy fights

between Soviets and Romanian-Nazi army, Chisinau was fiercely bombed. Another wave of bombing came with the retreat of Romanians in 1944 when they were forced out by progressing Soviet army. The second bombing was even more massive and destructive and left around 70% of the city in ruins (ibid). But not only had the city experienced total destruction, also local population suffered considerable losses and changes. There are not many inhabitants of contemporary Chisinau whose families would have been living in the capital for generations as one might know it from other European cities. Many of them perished under the ruins of war-torn city, many were killed either by Romanians (mostly Jews, minorities and Soviet sympathizers) or by Soviets (former officials in Romanian administrative) or deported to Siberia or sent to gulags. Chisinau used to be inhabited predominantly by non-Romanian speakers such as Jewish, Russians or Ukrainians, and thus 20<sup>th</sup> Century mass deportations, repressions and Holocaust hit hard Chisinau leaving huge gap in the city's memory. People who would have remembered old Chisinau mostly left or were killed, and new inhabitants coming from rural areas had no memory of the city. As a result, the continuity was greatly interrupted and the old pre-war city largely forgotten.

After the war there was an urgent need to recreate the devastated city, however, as Moldova became part of the Soviet Union, the reconstruction was undertaken in a specific and ideological way; many of damaged historical buildings were torn down instead of reconstructed, which specially applied for buildings not fitting into new ideological approach. As a result, many churches and synagogues have disappeared together with many buildings reminding of Romanian period. Sacred was transformed into political, and memory of Romanian times was erased. New developments were erected in Socialist realism and later in Socialist Modernism style. New Soviet master plan was introduced resulting in destruction of the majority of medieval parts of Chisinau which had survived the war madness. Generally speaking, the city was recreated according to Soviet dreams about ideal Soviet city. City planners had free hands and they truly made sure that the old Chisinau would be substituted with the new one.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and following independence of Moldova also affected future development of Chisinau. Drawing on my own observations during my stay, heritage city-walks, events organized by newly emerged activists movements, interviews with Chisinau inhabitants, but also internet discussions, internet forums where people share old photos of Chisinau and my own work with historical photos I argue that the post-independence chaos, wild privatisation, unregulated capitalism, corruption, lack of public resources, and general disinterest from the inhabitants resulted in current state when the city is

somehow crumbling and loosing fast the rests of its historical heritage. Many structures built during the Soviet period have been abandoned, let to decay or easily demolished to be substituted with some new developments. Some public spaces have been privatized, and various buildings – especially those not-money-oriented serving the wider public - have been demolished in order to be replaced with so-called “multifunctional centres”. As it was said, Chisinau was extensively damaged during the war and afterwards significantly transformed which resulted in loss of good-sized of its historical heritage. Unfortunately, the process has not stopped yet and the rests of city’s historical sites have been constantly threatened with disappearing or irreversible changes. For example, if one would take a walk through some of the last surviving crooked cobblestones-paved streets of ‘Lower Town’, she would see new glass-and-concrete skyscrapers built in the very heart of old Chisinau. One must consider the peculiar situation of Moldovan capital; so much has been lost that every demolished heritage site truly counts. The heritage protection and post-independence development of Chisinau is so broad and striking topic that it would definitely last for a whole thesis, but unfortunately it is beyond the means of this work.



## 4. Chisinau's memoryscape of forced Soviet deportations from MSSR

In this chapter Chisinau's cityscape connected with memory of forced Soviet deportations and Soviet repressions will be discussed. The term cityscape refers to urban equivalent of landscape; a city viewed as a scene, in this case linked with manifestations of memory embedded in urban environment. In the book *Urban Memory* Mark Crinson (2005, p. xii) argues: "Urban memory can be anthropomorphism (the city having a memory) but more commonly it indicates the city as a physical landscape and collection of objects and practices that enable recollections of the past and that embody the past through traces of the city's sequential building and rebuilding. [...] Accordingly urban memory seems to indicate cities as places where lives have been lived and still felt as physically manifest, shaping what is remembered beyond the discourses of architects, developers, preservationists, and planners". As it was mentioned above, vast majority of Chisinau was destroyed during the Second World War fights, and thousands of its inhabitants were killed, imprisoned or deported, which affected the cityscape heavily. If one follows Crinson's idea of "objects and practices that enable recollections of the past", which I understand as synonymic to Nora's *lieux de memoire*, we would identify these in Chisinau's memory landscape: museums, commemorations, monuments, buildings connected with Soviet repressions, and projects carried out by Chisinau based memory activists. The way how Chisinau urban landscape is constructed tells us probably more about the current public discourse than any history text book. The questions concerning the interpretation of recent past such as: who was the liberator and who was the occupant? Whose statue should we erect, and whose should we tear down? Who should we name our streets after? What buildings should be demolished and which should be preserved? What should be considered as heritage? and so on, are embedded in the urban landscape of Chisinau. The following pages will present and discuss empirical findings of my fieldwork by focusing on locations of remembering of the Soviet deportations and repressions of 1940s and 1950s.

### 4.1. Museums

Memory serves as a vehicle for expressing and analyzing public relationships to the past that is socially reconstructed through various realms such as archives, museums, school curricula, or monuments (Halbwachs, 1992). This chapter focuses on museums as realms of

memory that are believed to have a certain impact on memory-making processes. As Silke Arnold-de Simine noted: “The museum has undoubtedly become one of the vital social institutions responsible for transforming living memory into institutionally constructed and sustained commemorative practices which enact and give substance to group identities and foster memory communities” (Arnold-de Simine, 2013, p. 2).

However, the situation of Moldovan museology is an uneasy one and the field faces many challenges. One of them is the lack of funding; museums are notoriously underfinanced, and consequently there are not enough resources for any radical changes in the expositions. As a result, some of the museums have somehow ‘frozen in time’ and their transformation from Soviet-style museums to more contemporary ones has halted in the halfway. But not only the exhibitions and collections suffer from lack of financing. Also, the museum workers have to maintain their living with ridiculously low salaries, which does not make the career of professional museum worker very tempting for potential new candidates. Moreover, it is not possible to study museology, heritage studies or any closely related field at the university, which makes it difficult for those ‘brave ones’ who have decided to work with heritage, but it also means that the number of professionals employed in Moldovan museums have remained low.

Contemporary museums in Moldova are in need for some dramatic discursive shift. In several interviews I conducted, various museum workers shared an opinion that museums are predominantly supposed to be ‘something like more relaxed schools’ with the main objective of showing collections and teaching people about the past. Generally speaking, museums have been deprived of any significant agency; they are perceived neither by society, but neither by the museum workers themselves, as institutions with any ability to shape public discourse and public debates. They work only for very limited audience and are not able to attract wider and more diverse groups of visitors. Yet, it does not seem to worry them too much. Since the understood main reason for having a museum is to protect and preserve collections and do scientific research, the question of impact and agency is for many museum workers not on a table. As I was told by one museum worker: “I have never thought about it in this way”. The ideas of museums as spaces where the past can be lived and public debate can be facilitated, which could serve for mediating between various mnemonic groups or as forum for curating ongoing dialogs, are distant to contemporary understanding of the role of museums in Moldovan society. Nevertheless, although the impact museums can achieve is rather minimal, there certainly is some. Museums convey an image of Moldovan statehood, albeit the narrative is acceptable only for some segment of the society. They are also involved in

pedagogical activities and work with schools. Museums are considered to be places where to take one's children to show them about the history of the country, however, people would not visit them on a regular basis. The permanent exhibitions only barely change and museums cannot offer much more (with an exception of some important celebrations and thematic days), and therefore there is almost no reason for regular visits. Museums therefore remain sort of 'passive voice' in the public debates and discussions.

This chapter deals with the situation of Moldovan museums and expositions dedicated to Soviet period, respectively to deportations and political repressions during the Stalinist era. First of all, it is necessary to say that the position of these museums and expositions is not an easy one. As it was mentioned above, the public discourse on Soviet period is very fragmented. The perception of deported and persecuted people has many layers; not everybody in the country understands them as victims of malevolent regime, but rather as those who for whatever reasons deserved their destiny. In such a fragmented and contested environment it is greatly challenging to create an exhibition which would somehow nuance the topic and not side too much to one or another interpretation of the past and memory. During my fieldwork in Moldova I visited three museums or exhibitions dedicated to deportations, repressions and Soviet period in general. There is no museum dedicated exclusively to Soviet period as we know it from other countries with similar recent past experience as the one of Moldova (for example Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius, Museum of Occupation of Latvia in Riga, Museum of Occupations and Freedom in Tallinn, or Museum of Soviet Occupation in Tbilisi). For now it can be found in Chisinau a private museum 'Muzeul Memoriei Neamului', an exhibition dedicated to deportations and labour camps in National Museum of Archaeology and History, and an exhibition called Museum of Occupation in Military Museum.

#### **4.1.1. Muzeul Memoriei Neamului (Museum of Memory of the Nation)**

As Simona Mitroiu (2016) noted the recuperation of memory in post-authoritarian countries is carried out by either state-funded institutions or by non-governmental organisation, while the latter often pioneers the process. The museum Muzeul Memoriei Neamului (Museum of Memory of the Nation) supports this claim. This small private museum opened in 2002 in a basement of block-of-flats from initiative of former deportee, memory activists, and 'patriotic intellectuals' (sympathisers calling themselves in this way) is

bottom-up project originating from a deep dissatisfaction with Moldovan official memory politics. The museum guides and curators (who are often the same person) are people who have themselves experienced deportations, and who believe that by running the museum they can get their stories among public. The museum consists basically just of one larger room filled with various artefacts: books, photos, posters, paintings, pictures, maps, official documents and so on. It does not receive any official funding, and it covers its expenditure by own sources or by finance gifts from visitors and supporters, however is not frequently visited by many people, and therefore its funds are very limited. As I was told by the guide, sometimes school classes taught by active teachers, sometimes foreign tourists, activists or historians come, nevertheless the museum is definitely not perceived as a place where to go and spend free time. The guide noted that in her opinion people have become more and more apathetic and indifferent, and as a result the figure of visitors has been decreasing.

What needs to be elaborated on is the name of this institution – Muzeul Memoriei Neamului. In Romanian language there exists another word for describing a nation – *popor*. The word '*popor*' refers to more civic understanding of the term, while '*neam*' is perceived as ethnic-based expression. The decision to use the expression '*neam*' is not accidental, as the museum deals almost exclusively with Romanian-speaking inhabitants of Moldova, and is dedicated predominantly to deportations and Soviet repressions of the 1940s and 1950s committed on ethnic Romanians, albeit it encompasses also Soviet atrocities in other countries, for example Occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 or suppression of Hungarian Uprising in 1956. Generally speaking, it is a room of Soviet unjustness; the main focus lays on Soviet political repressions on one side, and the struggle for self-determination and freedom of Romanian-speaking inhabitants of Moldova on the other. The dichotomy between the search for the real 'Romanian self' of Moldovans which is extensively manifested through Romanian attributes such as Romanian flags, tricolour, stickers 'Bessarabie e România' (Bessarabia is Romania), inter-war period maps where Bessarabia is part of Greater Romania, portraits of Romanian writers such as Ion Creanga or Mihai Eminescu, and the Soviet period of suffering, humiliation, forced Russification and effort to disrupt the sense of belonging to Romanian world creates the main narrative of the museum. By identifying Romanian-speaking victims of Soviet regime as the solely bearers of the national memory, it completely excludes from the nation those who do not perceive the period as occupation or time of suffering, or those who indeed suffered, however not due to Soviets. That brings one to complete lack of any notions of Holocaust in the museum, even though Jews were definitely not negligible part of inhabitants of Bessarabia and thus should have been considered as part

of the 'nation' whose memory this museum aims to be saving. Nevertheless, there is not a single line saying anything about mass killings of these Bessarabian citizens during the 1941-1944 Romanian-Nazi occupation. In contrary, there are exhibited several portraits of Ion Antonescu, infamous Romanian war-time leader who allied with Nazis and was responsible for sending Romanian and Bessarabian Jews to death. As it was already mentioned in the chapter dealing with memory politics in Moldova, Holocaust is often used as anti-Romanian argument labelling Romanians as fascists and collaborators. The memory of Jewish mass murdering is somewhat subordinated to perception of Romanian times as the Golden Age, and that ultimately affects the pro-Romanists' sentiment towards Holocaust. The museum is therefore rather preoccupied with displaying horrors of Soviet repressions than elaborating on the various memories present in Moldovan society. Although the Prague Spring or Hungarian Uprising is by no means more relevant to the 'memory of the nation' than the Holocaust of Bessarabian Jews, it serves better the purpose of showing the Soviet regime as illegitimate, and simultaneously link oneself with the post-Communist suffering and resistance narrative.

The museum was opened in 2002, a year after the electoral victory of Communist party, in a reaction to changing memory politics that had been shifting from careful recognition of the suffering to almost complete omission and neglecting. As it was said the initiative came from private persons who somehow felt an urge to 'speak up' about their experience in this environment of wide-spread silence and 'institutionalized amnesia'. The fact that this museum was the first one in Moldova to deal with this topic is somehow self-explaining. As I was told by Teodosia Cozmin, the guide, survivor of forced deportations, and activist, the museum was established in order to keep alive the memory of Soviet atrocities and to speak about the memory in times when no official level of commemorating had been introduced. Mrs. Cozmin mentioned for several times the name of former Prime Minister Vladimir Voronin who was well known for his pro-Moldovanism approach and his allegedly very reserved feelings towards victims of Soviet repressions. This museum has been therefore opened in a reaction to the missing official level of recognition, and only later followed by state-funded museums dealing with the same topic.

#### **4.1.2. Museum of Soviet Occupation in the Museum of Military History**

The Military Museum, run directly by Moldovan Ministry of Defence, resides in a large and rather pretentious building on Tighina Street in central Chisinau. On its several

floors and outdoor military technique exhibition it shows Moldovan military history from the ancient time till the present days, and conveys a peculiar story of both military glory and victimhood and suffering. The museum targets predominantly Romanian-speaking Moldovans; it displays the narrative of Moldova as ancient and proud territory inhabited by ethnic-Romanians who have been thorough the history the winners as well as the victims of stronger neighbours. It emphasizes the era of medieval kings under whose rule Moldova experienced a glorious period, and it condemns both Tsarist Russia and Soviet period as a time of suffering and unfreedom. For example, right in the very first room there is a huge wall-painting showing portrait of Moldovan rulers since the times of Principality of Moldavia. Romanian king Ferdinand I. (1865-1927) is portrayed there, however Russian Tsars are missing entirely even though Bessarabia was part of Tsarist Russia for more than one hundred years (1812-1918). Tsarist period is, generally speaking, mentioned only in connection with First World War, and so in negative way as the power who forced unwilling Bessarabians to fight in a foreign war. Also, the Second World War is depicted as a time of great suffering caused mainly by Soviets. For example, there is displayed a map showing the progress of joint Romanian-Nazi troops in 1941 labelled as 'liberation of Bessarabia'. That is common understanding of this military operation in Romania, however in Moldova the 'liberation' resulted in another wave of political repressions and also in ethnic cleansings, and therefore remains for many rather an occupation than liberation. Space is also given to Soviet period operations in which Moldovan soldiers took part, with prominent position of War in Afghanistan and Chernobyl disaster. The recent history since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is represented by the Transnistrian conflict and involvement of Moldovan army in international operations in Liberia, Sudan, Georgia and Côte d'Ivoire. The Transnistrian conflict display uses audio visual technology, figurines and sound effects, and together with photos of fallen soldiers, dead civilians and mourning bereaved it really plays on emotions. However, the only panel informing visitors about these events is very short and speaks about 'awakening national consciousness disrupted by Russian army' which put one in mind of the romantic 'national-awakening' style.

The last remark leads one to think about the representations of Moldovan history in the museum. From the very beginning the lack of information panels, annotations or any accompanying texts is very visible. Modern museology also prefers less prescription and texts in the exhibitions and by doing so encourages the visitors to be in the dialog with their own experience and memory (Witcomb, 2003). Museum should be indeed much more a question than an answer, and make the visitors to think about what they saw and encourage them to ask

why rather than force them one 'true' interpretation. However, one must doubt this is the real intention behind the missing information in the Military museum. Albeit not offering the interpretations in written form, Chisinau Military museum conveys quite clearly the nationalistic story of martyrdom, suffering and glory. It does not address the complexity of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century events, and also does not question traditional and preoccupied pro-Romanian interpretations of Moldovan history. It is therefore not surprising that the rare information labels are only in Romanian, and sometimes in English, but never in Russian.

However, the main focus of this chapter lies on the exhibition called the Museum of Soviet Occupation of which name most probably aimed to link the museum to similar institutions in Baltic countries. First thing the visitor notices when entering the exhibition is the dramatic music which accompanies her through the whole exhibition. In the first room there are three huge panels: one is saying 'Soviet terror in Bessarabia', second depicting signing of Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and the last one showing a map of Soviet Union with marked sites of gulags. That is all for the introduction to the exhibition and one encounters here the lack of any accompanying texts as mentioned above. This missing information is however supplemented by sort of subliminal message: dramatic music, gloomy-light, and omnipresent straitened-feelings-raising dark colours convey quite straightforwardly what visitors should feel and how should they perceive the exhibition. In the second room there is a wall painting depicting transport wagon and family of deportees during their way to exile; in front of the painting there stands a figurine of Soviet soldier who supervises the transport. The whole scenery is appended by luggage and coffers which should evoke the only possession these people were allowed to take with them to Siberia. The whole installation with the luggage and coffers is classical symbol of deportations in successor states of Soviet Union. Besides that there is an all-wall panel (quite obviously a 'loan' from New York Museum of Jewish Heritage and Living Memorial to the Holocaust) with photos of victims of Soviet repressions, however it is not clearly said whether these are just the deportees or repressed people in general. Then the exhibition continues with a room dedicated to anti-Soviet partisan groups and political movements, yet again the informational panels lack any information about these groups, except for the names, dates of their existence and photos of their members (mostly mug shots). Vitrines display photos, protocols and documents, small personal items, and letters from prisons. Nevertheless, the narrative is quite clear here; to show Moldovan anti-Soviet resistance and freedom fighters in opposition to the Soviet oppression, disruption of democracy, and forceful abruption from Romania. This room is 'supervised' by huge bust

of Vladimir Lenin who watches on monumental reliefs on the walls depicting difficult life of Moldovans in Siberian exile.

Visitors can get to the next section of the museum by passing an on-wall-painted Lenin's quote about terror and political thinking. The number of displayed objects in this section (mostly of photos, family artefacts, pioneer uniforms, red flags and standards, busts of Vladimir Lenin and Felix Dzerzhinsky and so on) is quite impressive, yet it becomes difficult to follow since any basic periodization or thematic anchorage is missing and in the end it resemble more of the old-style 'cabinets of curiosities' than modern-days museums. There is also staged classroom which probably should embody propaganda in schools, interrogation room reconstruction, and interior of Gulag barracks with figurines and paintings of suffering inmates. As historian Ludmila Cojocari expressed her feelings during our interview in September 2018: "To me, this is a peculiar approach for societies with very poor (not elaborated) memory politics. Such an approach would be acceptable for the period from the very beginning of the post-communist history studies/understanding."

To conclude, the most of the exhibition consists of the Soviet period related items being put in the rooms without any obvious order. At the beginning visitors might feel impressed, as the exhibition is visually captivating and makes use of figurines and audio-visual technology which is still quite unique in other Moldovan museums. However, later one might find herself in an ideological and emotional environment which is presented to her without offering any facts that would contextualize the displayed objects. Feelings should be annotated by facts, accompanying texts that are important for meaning-making and constructing, sharing and interpreting a range of content, attitudes and values (Ravelli, 2006). By presenting only the feelings the intentions become very clear; to show Soviet period solely as terror, humiliation, and destruction of Moldovan democratic development without allowing any counter-narratives. A good example might be usage of photos of heavily damaged war-time Chisinau. Nowadays there are fierce debates on who is actually responsible for the destruction of Moldovan capital during the Second World War; whether Soviets or Romanians. It is naturally difficult to distinguish between damages caused by Soviets and those caused by Romanians, especially during the final offensive in 1944, and it remains very vital for both "camps" to blame each other. Heated discussion surrounds in particular the destruction of Chisinau cathedral. Everybody has an opinion about the real perpetrators, and it probably does not come as a surprise that the curators of the exhibition put labels under the photos of devastated Chisinau stating that Soviets did it, even though there is no consensus on that. The museum clearly takes a side in this debate, and neglects the other side entirely.



Drawing on the exhibition narrative the museum's goal is to reassure the narrative of suffering and humiliation under Soviet occupation and contribute to politics of recognition for this narrative.

#### **4.1.3. National Museum of Archaeology and History**

The National Museum of Archaeology and History is located in the very centre of Chisinau in a building of former Boy's Gymnasium No.1. It is successor institution of former State Museum of History of MSSR which was established in 1983 as a main institution dealing and researching about history of Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. Its collections are the largest in whole country, and it is also considered in Moldovan context as a prestigious research institution. The primary interest in this museum was local exhibition dealing with Soviet deportations and labour camps 'Soviet Moldova: Between Myth and Gulag' opened in 2012. I had a chance to speak with one of the authors, historian Ludmila Cojocari, who told me more about the story behind it. She noted that, as the memory of former deportees used to be for a long time marginalized and pushed on the very edge of public interest, similarly there was no official platform that would raise the issue. Only after the 'Twitter revolution' in 2009 and the following discursive shift there has been decided that new Museum of Victims of Political Deportations and Repression should be opened and that the topics of deportations and repressions should be more emphasized. Ludmila Cojocari told me that there was political will to actually open the museum, and that the whole idea looked for some time quite real, however, some bureaucratic issues emerged, which have ultimately stopped the process. Until nowadays there has not been opened any museum dedicated to totalitarian regimes similar to those we know from Baltic countries or from Hungary. Instead of that the National Museum of Archaeology and History took it on itself and decided to open at least an exhibition dealing with Soviet deportations and repressions in their own building. The opening ceremony was a great event where many former deportees and political prisoners were invited, as well as activists, historians, well-known figures of Moldovan social life, and last but not least politicians, in particular the Prime Minister Vlad Filat of Democratic Party who held a speech (Postică, 2013).

Elena Postică, also one of the curators, describes the exhibition as an "attempt to present to the public the two components of the society: the illusory world of those who embraced the 'Soviet dream', naively believing in the ideals of freedom and justice, in the

‘bright future’ of Soviet propaganda, and the world of those who knew the inferno of the communist camps and prisons” (Postică, 2013, p. 345). The intention to put the ‘dream world’ of people who actually believed in Soviet regime into opposition with those who suffered from its hands is definitely an interesting approach. Yet, the suffering line is rather over-contextualized while the ‘dreaming’ line is de-contextualized which makes the exhibition’s intention ambiguous, and blunts the initial idea. Moreover, as Postică mentions in her article the exhibition should reveal a “complete image of the communist dictatorship, humiliation and suffering of the Romanian population from the East of the Prut” (ibid, p. 354), which excludes from the narrative of Soviet period suffering all inhabitants of Moldova with non-Romanian origin. The exhibition itself is located in the basement of the museum and consists of two rooms. The visitor can see there many objects connected predominantly with everyday life in gulags and in Siberia; private photos, letters from Siberia, clothes, personal belongings, official documents, books published on the topic and so on. What distinguishes this exhibition from the two above mentioned is the intention to annotate the displaying objects. In the first room there is a huge information board written in three languages (Romanian, Russian and English, whereby these are employed in the whole exhibition which makes it inclusive also for non-Romanian speakers) that offers some basic information about Stalinist deportations and repressions. The curators describe communist regime as one which “committed a series of crimes against humanity: genocide, political repressions, and the organized famine.” The word ‘genocide’ in particular is worthy to highlight.

This exhibition is indeed very different from both Military Museum and Museum of National Memory, and it is obvious that it was created by professional historian and museum worker. Even though the introduction board informs about genocide and crimes against humanity, the exhibition itself is not very emotional; it rather aims to be informative, ‘objective’, and do not blame anybody in solely aggressive way. However, unlike the Military Museum which uses audio visual techniques, figurines and lots of 3D objects, and the Museum of National Memory where the guide is real former deportee, exhibition in National Museum of Archaeology and History lacks something that would drag people’s attention. The classic-style show-cases with photographs, letters and official documents are quite unlikely to attract many visitors, and the location in the museum’s basement does not help either. I am not familiar with the concrete figures, but when I visited the museum during the whole time I spent there only two or three visitors came to see the exhibition. I guess that some more prestigious location within the museum or at least some better information signs which would really attract people to go downstairs might be useful. Although it is necessary to appreciate

scholarly approach and obvious effort for nuancing the story, the possible impact of this exhibition remains very low.

During the time of my fieldwork the museum accommodated another exhibition dedicated to deportations and life stories of former deportees. This one was located in the museum's first floor corridor and consisted of several panels with life stories, and of some photos, personal items and books of memoirs. The focus, however, laid on life stories and biographies. That was different from the basement exhibition, since this one displayed rather stories of real people who have been through these terrible events, than just photos and official documents. While creating an exhibition one might take into account the power of life stories; life stories speak to visitors in a more urgent way and can convey the message more effectively. The usage of life stories is thus very important mean of transferring exhibition's goals. The very sporadic deployment of life stories in the basement exhibition is therefore a missed opportunity to not only make it more appealing to visitors but also to empower the victims.

To conclude, the National Museum of Archaeology and History has definitely the most nuanced approach and professional authors and curators. Yet, the representation of Soviet period remains somewhere in the middle; on one hand it expresses a will to offer a multi-layered and diverse vision of the past, but at the same time it still keeps the line of ethnic-based exclusivity and clear distinction between victims and perpetrators. The old-school form and location in the non-prominent part of the museum strengthen the conclusion that the exhibition can barely make any huge impact in Moldovan society and open a broader discussion on the Soviet heritage. Nevertheless, it is until these days the least biased exhibition on the topic we can find in Chisinau.

## **4.2. Monuments and commemoration practices**

Besides museums, Chisinau's memoryscape is also constituted by monuments and commemoration rituals dedicated to Soviet deportations and repressions. Monuments as an important source for upholding memory and constituting cultural and national identities reveal a lot about contemporary politics of memory; their number, year of unveiling, location, way of financing, authors and also whether they are maintained and visited or not show what place in society the concrete event occupy. Nora argues that monuments as sites of memory are symbolic elements of the memorial heritage of any community (Nora, 1989), yet in Moldovan

context one might raise the question: who is the community? As it will be discussed later in the chapter monuments and commemoration practices connected with deportations and repressions are visited only by certain segment of population, mostly by former deportees, their relatives, and memory activists. The impact on the broader public is, similarly as in the case of museums, quite limited and increases only during important dates and jubilees.

During my fieldwork I became aware of the existence of three monuments dedicated to the Soviet deportations and repressions: one standing in front of House of Government, one located on a place of former war-time NKVD office, and last one standing in front of Main Railway Station. Yet, only the last mentioned serves as a site of periodic annual commemorations, while the remaining two are far less visible and less important. As it was already mentioned in the chapter dealing with memory politics, most of the monuments dedicated to Soviet deportations and repressions were erected only after discursive shift in 2010, many of them by the Liberal Party initiative that aimed to build a Soviet period victim's monument in every town and city. Also all of the Chisinau monuments were erected during this period which favoured similar initiatives. And how have these monuments positioned themselves in Chisinau memoryscape will be elaborated on following pages.

Besides the monuments, this chapter also includes one special case – a building in centre of Chisinau that although being deeply connected with Soviet repression is not anyhow recognized as a site of memory or site of commemoration. This case is so peculiar that it has to be included in the thesis even though it is not a real monument or place of commemoration.

#### **4.2.1. Monument to 'Bessarabians massacred by Bolsheviks'**

The first monument to be discussed bears an inscription to 'Bessarabians massacred by Bolsheviks' and commemorates the site of war-time NKVD office. The monument is located near a popular leisure-time area of Valea Morilor in the Chisinau's 'Upper Town', on a place where used to stand a building of Italian Embassy which was during the first Soviet occupation in 1940 transformed into NKVD office. There interrogations and mass killings of 'enemies of the state' would take place, and dead bodies of those who were tortured to death or simply shot were buried in mass graves in the very residency's garden. After the Romanians and Nazis took over the city in 1941, this place was investigated and the victims exhumed from the mass graves, whereas the investigation results and documentation was used for anti-Communist propaganda. During the offensive in 1944 and withdraw of Romanian-

Nazi army which was followed by second Soviet occupation, Chisinau was severely bombed and the building of NKVD office was completely destroyed. During the post-war Soviet period there was, obviously, no information about the infamous character of the place. Chisinau municipality even constructed an open-air dancing stage nearby that became very popular especially during 1960s and 1970s. The collective amnesia outlived the fall of Soviet Union and regime change, and only after the discursive shift in 2010 (see chapter 3.3.) a small monument was erected in 2010 to commemorate all the victims, who had lost their lives there.

Although the monument was revealed, it has not been attracting much attention, and no annual commemorations happen there. Yet, last year it became a venue of commemorative event held by near Saint Seraphim of Sanov church. The so-called ‘Prayer of Memory’ took place on 6<sup>th</sup> of July (the official commemorative day) and aimed to pray for all the innocent people who died and suffered in the deportations. The main organiser was Orthodox priest Ioan Dohut of the Saint Seraphim of Sanov church who held a speech: *The place where currently stands our church was during the 60s and 70s a dance parquet. And all the people who danced there, who had fun there, they would never guess that they are literally dancing on human bones. In 1940-1941 this place was covered with moats where they would bring so-called "enemies of the people" during the nights and shot them to death. More than five thousand people have remained to lie in this soil forever. And these were the greatest people of its time! Our bounded duty is to remember these people forever and command this memory to our children, grandchildren and grand-grandchildren.*<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the monument is half-forgotten and poorly maintained. Moreover, this site has been recently rented out by Chisinau municipality to neighbouring restaurant, which was allowed to set up a terrace on the very place where so many people lost their lives. Shortly put, the restaurant decided to expand its business, and the fact that they plan to build a fancy terrace on former graves of political repression’s victims does not seem to bother the owner too much. Moreover, due to the construction site, the monument was moved from its original place to new location over the road, which might be considered as highly unrespectable to the victims. Currently there had been built a fence and some constructions have already begun. The relocation of the monument, and the construction works have not sparked any outrage; almost nobody has raised awareness, or started any actions against building restaurant terrace on the site of former NKVD office. The fact that basically nobody

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<sup>4</sup> В Кишиневе прошло молитвенное чтение имен репрессированных в день памяти массовой депортации бессарабцев. In: Преображенское братство [online]. [Accessed 2019-04-03]. Available at: <https://psmb.ru/a/v-den-pamiati-massovoi-deportatsii-bessarabtsev-v-kishineve-proshlo-molitvennoe-chtenie-imen-zhertv-repressii.html>

protested the intention only underlines the earlier claims that the events have been largely forgotten, and the memory deeply disrupted. The official body allowing the construction only confirms the unclear memory politics and approaches towards the recent past.

#### **4.2.2. Monument of the Victims of the Soviet Occupation and Totalitarian Soviet Regime**

The second monument to be discussed is the one located in front of the House of Government. The peculiar story of this place and its changing statues and monuments was already briefly described in third chapter. In 2011 the Liberal Party initiated a construction of the Monument in the Memory of Victims of the Soviet Occupation and Totalitarian Soviet Regime on this prominent place where all important monuments have ever stood (Axenti, 2017). That was unequivocally highly symbolic gesture – the obvious intention to put the memory of Soviet atrocities in the centre of the capital, on the very place where all the major political changes and shifts have been manifested during the Moldovan history. However, this idea sparked outrage among certain people, as not everybody understood the Soviet time as either occupation or totalitarian regime, and, therefore, categorically refused such a depiction of the past days. The result of this action was then somewhat puzzling as there has been revealed a stone with inscription saying *In this place will stand a monument to victims of Soviet occupation and communist totalitarian regime*. Since then, nothing has really happened; nobody has had enough political will and confidence to either tear down the stone completely or finally construct the proposed monument. Instead of that, this stone has been standing there as a sort of monument to indecisiveness of Moldovan people about their own recent past, and sums up quite well the ongoing debates and competing narratives surrounding Soviet period and present times. Some people perceive the Soviet period as ultimate evil and therefore ask for official condemnation, while others might feel nostalgic and keep their Soviet identity. Since there has been no serious attempt to somehow mediate the debate and come to the terms with the uneasy questions regarding Moldovan recent past, the society has remained fragmented of which the best example is this ‘monument’.

### **4.2.3. The 'Train of Sorrow'**

The last monument, called by many the 'Train of Sorrow', was revealed in 2013 in front of the Chisinau Main Railway Station. It remains somewhat striking that the deportees were given the first monument dedicated solely to their suffering only in 2013 - 72 years after the first wave of deportations. This place has become the main venue for annual commemoration act which takes place on 6<sup>th</sup> of July, the date when back in 1949 the most massive wave of deportations was launched. On the every 6<sup>th</sup> of July the 'Train of Sorrow' is visited by survivors of the deportations and their family members, activists, historians, and politicians. The number of Moldovans without any family connections with deportations (e.g. no family member has been deported) who would come to commemorate these events, is rather low, and considering the increasing age of the survivors, the commemorative events are less and less visited every year. If we would compare it with for example Estonia, where the 25<sup>th</sup> of March is analogical date to 6<sup>th</sup> of July, we would definitely see the difference; in Estonia the 25<sup>th</sup> of March is widely commemorated and many people take part in commemorations even though they do not have any personal tights with deportations. In Moldova the commemorations have remained something rather personal, intimate, and important only for specific layer of society that feels personally attached. Moreover, many consider it as manifestation of anti-Russian and pro-Romanian sentiment, as some people who are actively involved in the commemorations are also loud pan-Romanists.

The commemoration taking place by the 'Train of Sorrow' is rather simple. People bring flowers and candles, politicians, and mainly Prime Minister, lay flowers and hold speeches, sometimes the names of victims are read loud. Also, all the flags on official buildings are half-staff. The tradition of this commemoration was launched by Liberal Party and its Prime Minister Vlad Filat who was quite active and, in a way, advocated for the former deportees. It was his government which guaranteed some pension for the survivors, albeit it was ridiculous amount even to reality of Moldova – the compensation was 100 lei per month (approximately 6€) and then once in a year 1000 lei (= ca 60€) so it might have been perceived more like a pure populism than actual help and recognition. In 2018 the amount was increased to 500 lei per month (approximately 30€) which is still sort of mock. During the last year commemoration unsatisfied survivors confronted Prime Minister Pavel Filip of Democratic Party, and demanded more support and recognition from the state. They complained that it is not possible to make a living out of the little pension they obtain and that it is unbearable situation. The average retirement pension gets about 80€ per month which is

definitely not enough to ensure a decent living. The commemoration thus might serve also as a way how to address respective politicians and demand some changes.

#### **4.2.4. Former KGB headquarters**

In many post-Communist or post-authoritarian countries the places connected with repressive powers have become memorial sites or memorial museums. For example, in Baltic countries the former KGB interrogation cells and headquarters have been transformed into museums, and in Russia the famous Perm 36 Gulag museum has been opened. However, in Chisinau and more broadly in whole Moldova this process has not started yet and places of Soviet era terror, suffering and mass murders have barely got any recognition. This indifference is closely intertwined with the unclear politics of memory and contested public discourse on the Soviet period.

In Chisinau there are two buildings of the former KGB that are closely connected with the repressions of 1940s and 1950s. One of them is nowadays used as a headquarters for Moldovan security service. When I was driving with a bus, accompanied by one museum worker, he suddenly pointed out from a window, remarked about the building's history, and then added: "You see? Still the same...". The continuity of these two organisations has not been disrupted even on symbolical level by moving to another object, which somewhat shows the unclear and unarticulated distance from the former organisation and the former regime as such.

More interesting case of a place of which dark history has been completely neglected is however another building that stands in a centre of Chisinau. It used to serve after the Second World War as a seat of KGB, and has been eventually transformed into residential house for KGB officers and their families after the KGB settled in another, bigger building (the one mentioned above). In the underground there have been preserved interrogations cells similar to those one might know from other post-Soviet cities, which have been gradually transformed into regular basements. The families of former KGB agents have been probably still living in the house, and nobody seems to be really interested in either preserving the cells and turning them into museum, or at least putting on some plaque to commemorate the dark history of this house. The mnemonic potential of this building has not been evoked as it had happened in some other countries. In Chisinau's cityscape it is just another ordinary house in the centre, and only few people dealing with history know what can be found in its cellars. I



argue that it fits well the vision of Chisinau as a city that has lost big deal of its memory, and whose inhabitants have been exposed to ‘institutionalized amnesia’ that resulted in their indifference towards the past. Also, the unwillingness of remembering coming from official levels, and contested memory politics contribute to this silence and forgetting.

### **4.3. Chisinau based memory activists**

This chapter makes a shift from museums and monuments as institutional agents of memory to private and individual agents of memory represented by memory activists. Memory activism can take many forms, stretching from nationalistic search and fight for the ‘true’ memory (Melchior, 2015, p. 179) to efforts for creating an inclusive memory of greater equality, plurality and reconciliation (Gutman, 2017). In this thesis the memory activism is understood as an initiative of private and individual subjects that aim to influence public debate, reshape the collective memory, and question the official narrative, and by commemorating contested pasts to protest the forced forgetting or silencing of certain events in official memory discourses (Górska, 2016).

Chisinau is a home of quite some people who are actively involved in projects dealing with memory of Soviet period. Some of them are members of NGOs, some are publicly-known figures or activists, some are artists, journalists etc. This chapter will introduce works of three persons which we can call memory activists: Octavian Țicu (politician and public person), Ghenadie Popescu (artist) and Victor Popovici (activist and heritage protection worker). This chapter is closely connected with theories of post-memory, ‘my-their’ memory and chosen trauma as described in theoretical and methodological chapter. With an exception of Popovici, both Țicu and Popescu belong to ‘generation of post-memory’ as they have family connections with deportees or repressed, and their decision to become memory activists is influenced by that. The memory of Soviet repressions has become vital for their sense of identity. However, dealing with such testimonies can get very emotional and sometimes even act as a traumatic experience on its own, since listening to such stories is difficult not only for the witnesses, but also for the listener (Chaitin&Steinberg, 2013). An extensive exposure to collective memories of past atrocities and deep emotional investment can consequently evolve in a state when people perceive these events even more personally than the real witnesses. I argue that the deep emotions surrounding especially works of Popescu are in direct consequence of missing official narrative and public recognition of

victims of Soviet deportations and repressions. In a process of recuperation of memory in post-authoritarian countries with contested environment and unclear memory politics the strong emotional involvement serves as a reaction to (imagined) insufficient and de-contextualized representation and omnipresent indifference towards the events that the memory activists perceive as constituent parts of their identity. As a result, their willingness to approach the recent past with more empathy and inclusiveness and in less straight-forward and exclusive way might get very low.

#### **4.3.1. Octavian Țicu: Expedition of Memory**

Octavian Țicu is well-known figure, albeit for many he remains rather controversial due to his open pan-Romanian opinions. He is politician (former minister of Youth and Sport, also currently he has been elected to parliament for pro-European party ACUM.), historian and former professional boxer. He comes from a family affected by Soviet repressions, as his grandmother was one of the deportees to Siberia. As it was mentioned, his leanings are clearly pan-Romanian, and therefore his perception of Soviet past is predominantly negative. He emphasises strong cultural and historical ties with Romania (and is vocal supporter of unification with Romania) and perceives Moldovanism as something artificially created by Soviet regime in order to disrupt the relations between Moldova and Romania. Drawing on an interview I conducted with him in September 2018 he sees the origin of contemporary Moldovan misery in a failure of Romanisation (in a sense of a process of returning to the ‘true Romanian-self’ and abandoning the Soviet Moldovan identity) and inability of Romanianess to become a new post-Soviet national identity. Moreover, he argues that as a result of this lost battle over eradication of Soviet identity the country has become divided, young and educated people has begun to leave, and as ultimate consequence people disgusted by the political and social situation voted in 2001 election for Communists who then halted the development of the country for years.

Expedition of Memory, an international project (mostly Moldovans and Romanians take part in it) aims to track Moldovan deportees to Siberia and Kazakhstan and find out more about their fate there. As Țicu quite interestingly noted, there are many testimonies from people who were allowed to come back and stay in Moldova after Stalin’s death, but we know little about those who have decided to stay in Siberia and Kazakhstan or who eventually returned there after realizing that Soviet Moldova has turned into hostile place where they

have barely any future. The Expedition of Memory thus carries out a research among local inhabitants who have Moldovan roots, but feel home in Siberia or Kazakhstan. The first expedition was undertaken in 2013 in Kazakhstan, as well as the second one in 2014. In 2016 and 2017 expedition relocated to Siberia to the Irkutsk region and the Krasnoyarsk region, followed by Tomsk region and Novosibirsk region in 2018. The members of the expeditions are mostly historians, students, but also journalists and film makers, which gives it a potential for wider publicity. Indeed, there have been created several documentaries based on the material shot during the expeditions, which have been broadcasted on TV or during public screenings and discussions. Țicu states that the expeditions should “achieve civic activism among young people from the Republic of Moldova and generate a social consensus in society.”<sup>5</sup> He also claims that: “The program aims to organize a summer expeditions to the places where our fellow citizens have been deported by Soviets, which would offer the possibility to involve the young generation in learning about our history. Identifying the places where the Romanians/Moldovans have been deported, recovering their graves; that creates an awareness of our historical past through personal experiences. The social and educational impact of this project is extremely complex and can have immediate and long-lasting effects on the historical education of young people in the Republic of Moldova, their involvement in the recovery of our historical past, identification of common landmarks of the cohabiting nationalities marked by the harmful effects of the Soviet period, offering them an increased level of cohesion, communication and engagement in a social dialogue aimed at consolidating ourselves at national level.”<sup>6</sup> It is clear that the project is really ambitious, but also somehow one-sided. As it was mentioned before, Țicu is openly pro-Romanian, and therefore the whole project tends to see Moldovan nation as consisting of Moldovans/Romanians only, and the Russians (Soviets) as in the most cases perpetrators, although it does not say it openly. The projects is also undertaken in close cooperation with Romanians and co-funded by Romanian state which can be seen as sort of Romanian soft-power. As an example of project’s biased nature serves a thin brochure/field notes *Through empathy and tolerance to cohesion: The Memory Expedition into Siberia 2016* (Olaru-Cemitar, 2016) written by one member of the project, a historian Viorica Olaru-Cemitar in which she comments on her experience, and which was released as sort of official outcome of

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<sup>5</sup> Octavian Țicu//Expedițiile Memoriei (I): Basarabeni din regiunea Tomsk. (2018). In Citidianul.md [online] [Accessed 2019-04-01] Available at: <https://cotidianul.md/2018/09/26/octavian-ticu-expeditiile-memoriei-i-basarabeni-din-regiunea-tomsk/>

<sup>6</sup> ibid

the expedition. Even though the title promises ‘empathy and tolerance’ the reality is slightly different. She is surprised that the descendants of deportees living there are not very touched by the family history, and take it quite easy. They even expressed their opinions that they have nice life there, and their parents also did not complain, and were just happy – they married, had children, house, and field and so on, so why should they be upset about the deportations or Soviet period in general? Olaru-Cemitar reacts to this utterance by calling these people ‘victims of Stockholm syndrome’ (Olaru-Cemitar, 2016, p. 23) leaving for them no agency in deciding about the perception of their very own life, similarly as in her another statement where she writes that the descendants: “[...] need to be informed about the history of deportations, and through them a process to recover the oral memory and history can be started, while it is still not too late“ (ibid, p. 27). It was the unexpected finding that locals do not share her vision of Soviet period that made her question their ability to interpret their own past and present, and describe their voices as untrustworthy, confused, ignorant and necessary to be corrected. It is nice example of emotional investment in the research and preoccupations brought to the field that prevented her from less biased interpretations. This is, however, not unique; positive memories of the Soviet times used to be considered as ‘Soviet brainwash’ also in other post-Communist countries, predominantly during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Kõresaar&Jõesalu, 2016, p. 51). Each post-Communist country has to go through the process of coming to terms with its own recent past, and find its ways how to deal with this uneasy heritage.

#### **4.3.2. Victor Popovici: The Last Address and Stolpersteine**

Projects launched by Victor Popovici aim to commemorate people who fell victim to both Romanian-Nazi occupation, and Soviet occupation, and following Soviet regime. The projects of Last Address and Stolpersteine are not new, or conceived in Moldova; however, Chisinau is the first place in the whole country where they have appeared. The Last Address is project originating in Russia that aims to commemorate victims of forced deportations by putting a small iron board on the houses where these people lived, and from which they were dragged out to be taken to Siberia. The board includes deportee’s names, and dates of their birth, death and day of deportation.<sup>7</sup> Similar project, connected, however, more with the

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<sup>7</sup> Мемориальный проект «Последний адрес». In: Фонд последний адрес [online]. [Accessed 2019-04-11]. Available at: <https://www.poslednyadres.ru/about/>

Holocaust and extermination of Jews and minorities, appeared simultaneously with the Last Address. So-called Stolpersteine were conceived by a German artist who had launched this project firstly on the territory of Germany, and later it has expanded around most of the Europe. Stolpersteine is small cobblestone with pseudo-golden surface with inscription informing about the name, date of birth, and date and place of death of the person who perished during Holocaust (Cook, 2014). Similarly as the Last Address, Stolpersteine should be located in front of the house where people had lived before they were taken to concentration camps, or killed during pogroms. Stolpersteine is much more spread in Europe than Last Address, but again, only recently it has made its way to Moldova, concretely and exclusively to the capital. Currently there have been installed two Last Address boards and two Stolpersteine cobblestones in Chisinau.

Both of these projects were initiated by Victor Popovici, Chisinau based activist and a cultural heritage worker. As he told me during our meetings in September 2018 and March 2019, he launched the Last Address and Stolpersteine projects after he encountered them in other European cities. He was convinced that Chisinau with its own history of pogroms, the Holocaust and deportations cries for similar commemorations. What is worth emphasizing is the intention to thematise both Holocaust and deportations. As it was already mentioned these atrocities somewhat ‘compete’ with each other and are, unfortunately, sometimes used in political agenda, and for personal interests. Thus, Holocaust might be perceived as a tool of anti-Romanian propaganda, while deportations as of anti-Russian (Soviet) sentiment. For many, especially among Russian-speaking inhabitants of Moldova or Gagauz people, the perception of Romanians as fascists is still rather spread and strong, and at the same time from the opposite camp, Russians are seen as the perpetrators of the persecutions and Communist-era crimes. It was noted that some people do not see deportees as real victims, because they believe that they somehow deserved their destiny, or that their lives in Siberia were after all not that bad. The same applies for victims of the Holocaust who were believed to collaborate with Soviets, and therefore considered as traitors, which apparently excuses their persecutions. This approach of ‘victim competition’ is unfortunately still very strong, especially among older-generation of researchers. That is why Popovici’s intention to include both the main traumas of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century instead of just choosing one is unique, and it shows the changing discourse among the younger generation that is not that deeply involved in one or other opinion camps. The approach is more nuanced and less emotional and nationalistic; it works with contemporary cosmopolitan visions that try to bridge over the division of the society, and emphasize things people share rather than which divide them. The territory of

Moldova has been always multi-ethnic and multicultural, and the suffering of all inhabitants of this land should be considered as tragedy touching everybody regardless their ethnicity or religious or political belief. That is the main difference - this discourse sees both deportations and Holocaust as an integral part of Moldovan collective memory and national narrative.

However, the process of obtaining all the documents to actually install both the plaques and cobblestones was long and full of obstacles. It was necessary to get approval from municipality, Heritage protection office and also confirmation from the Academy of Science that the information written on the plaque or stone is true (e.g. that no 'bandits' will be commemorated). As Popovici mentioned, the first big challenge was to even get any information about the repressed people. Initially, he tried to contact some historians, but as he claims, they were biased and political, and tried to persuade him to drop the Holocaust part of the project. Some also refused to help him without being paid. However, the biggest problem appeared when the projects were discussed by a city commissions, and one of the commission's high-ranked member found out that among the victims of Holocaust and Nazi regime that the Stolpersteine commemorates belong also people repressed because of their sexual orientation. Moldova is considered as one of the less LGBT-friendly countries in Europe<sup>8</sup>, and this person did not want to support anything linked to LGBT, and therefore he stopped both the projects, although he had been initially very supportive, as his own parents were deported to Siberia. As the result, the projects had serious problems to obtain all the necessary documents, and till nowadays the Stolpersteine remains installed without the official permission. Another challenge was to persuade the owners of the houses to allow the installation of the plaques and the cobblestones. Again, not everybody was willing to give the permission, especially in a case of the Stolpersteine, because the wide-spread perception of the Holocaust victims is, as it was mentioned, as of traitors, collaborators and bandits who, ultimately, deserved to be repressed. Moreover, considering the war-time destruction of the city, many houses which used to be homes of the first wave deportees (1941) or the Holocaust victims (1941-1944) have been destroyed, and therefore it is not possible to put there any plaque or Stolpersteine for the simple reason that these buildings are no more.

The project dragged attention of media and for some period there were newspaper articles being released and Popovici was even invited to speak about the project on TV.

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<sup>8</sup>The Violations of the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons in MOLDOVA: A Shadow Report. In: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner [online]. [Accessed 2019-04-12] Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/MDA/INT\\_CCPR\\_NGO\\_MDA\\_97\\_9594\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/MDA/INT_CCPR_NGO_MDA_97_9594_E.pdf)

However, the real impact remained rather low. Since there have been installed only two Last Addresses and two Stolpersteine, it is quite difficult to notice this project in streets of Chisinau. Moreover, Popovici complained that even though many people expressed their support, nobody has been really willing to join him in the initiative, and help to spread the project, albeit he promised to share the know-how. Although remaining marginal, this project stands as a good example of new discourse emphasizing the equal treatment of both groups of victims, and considering both of them as having a rightful place in Moldovan recent past and Moldovan national narrative. Unfortunately this approach remains rather marginal.

#### **4.3.3. Ghenadie Popescu: Deportari.md**

The last person to be discussed in this chapter is artist Ghenadie Popescu. He is involved in memory activism in two ways – firstly, he runs a webpage called *deportari.md* where he uploads life stories of formerly deported people, and secondly, he creates puppet stop-motion short-movies based on the testimonies he collects. His initiative is an interesting example of very grassroots project initiating from personal and emotional connection, deep disagreement and frustration with public omission and marginalization of the topic, but also strong pro-Romanian approach towards Moldova's past and future. In this matter, it is needed to put Popescu's project to the same camp with Octavian Țicu's Expedition of Memory, rather than with Popovici's cosmopolitan approach. Popescu, similarly as Țicu, is personally engaged, as his grandfather was forcefully sent to Soviet Union for work. Yet, unlike Țicu and Popovici, Popescu does not have any formal education in history, ethnography or any related fields; he has involved himself in the project out of pure urge to preserve the stories he considers to be extremely important, yet, on the edge of disappearance. If one would compare this project with similar initiatives that also aim to collect witnesses and put them online – for example Estonian Kogu Me Lugu<sup>9</sup>, or Czech Paměť národa<sup>10</sup> – the essential differences would be noticeable. Firstly, Popescu does not have any funding or financial support so the whole project is financed by his own money. In Estonia, Czech Republic, Poland and other post-Communist countries this kind of projects are often state (co)funded or carried out in collaboration with state institutions, they are run by professionals, and well taken care of. The lack of finances, and also the fact that Popescu does not have any co-workers, ultimately

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<sup>9</sup> Kogu Me Lugu. [online]. [Accessed 2019-05-08]. Available at: <https://www.kogumelugu.ee/en/>

<sup>10</sup> Paměť národa. [online]. [Accessed 2019-05-08]. Available at: <https://www.pametnaroda.cz/en>

shapes the outcomes, as he does everything by himself starting with finding the survivors and contacting them, travelling to their homes, recording the interview, postproduction and uploading it online. Also, his equipment is very old and consequently the recordings are not the best quality, which affects the sound in particular. When asked to describe his methods he stated that he utilizes no specific means of interviewing or approaching the people. Sometimes the witnesses do not even know that he is coming inasmuch as it is difficult to get in touch in advance with the people living in the rural areas. That results in him just 'crashing in' somebody's place without prior warning, which obviously, affects the interview significantly. People might be suspicious, they do not have enough time to befriend the research or establish some relationship and trust. All the videos are in Romanian, and there are no subtitles, nor Russian nor English. Even though Popescu tried to put some English subtitles to several videos, these remain mostly in a form of fragments. Russian is not included at all.

However, Popescu is not the only person in Moldova who collects the witnesses of former deportees and repressed people. The Institute of Social History 'ProMemoria' affiliated to the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Moldova State University also aims to collect these testimonies, and the people involved are formally educated historians.<sup>11</sup> There is another initiative Institute of Oral History which is led by Alexei Tulbure a professional historian.<sup>12</sup> However, these three initiatives do not collaborate with each other, which is also interesting observation. One might only guess the reasons behind, especially in a case of Popescu and Tulbure, since their projects are very similar. When asked why he does not coordinate his activities with Tulbure, Popescu replied that Tulbure collects Holocaust testimonies and these are beyond the scope of his project. However, Tulbure records both Holocaust and deportation testimonies, and by not knowing (or not acknowledging) that Popescu express his indifference towards Tulbure's work. That approach is, however, characteristic for the analyzed memoryscape: different agents do not cooperate, and cannot see themselves as a part of a larger network. Their projects therefore stand as more or less isolated realms in the memory landscape.

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<sup>11</sup>About ISH. In: Institute of Social History "ProMemoria" [online]. [Accessed 2019-05-08]. Available at: <http://promemoria.md/en/about/>

<sup>12</sup> О институте. In: Институт устной истории Молдовы [online]. [Accessed 2019-05-08]. Available at: <http://oralhistory.md/rus/o-institute>



## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the memory surrounding the forced Soviet deportations from Moldavian SSR during the 1940s and 1950s, and to contribute to better understanding of the mnemonic processes within the contemporary Moldovan society. Republic of Moldova has been since its independence in 1991 in a process of searching for its new post-Soviet identity, narratives, collective memory, and, in generally, its new post-Soviet self. By describing and analysing the mnemonic processes regarding Moldovan recent past, this thesis made an effort to illuminate the problematics of contested and fragmented memory of Moldovan Soviet past that belongs among the many challenges this country faces in its attempt to reconceptualise its identity.

The thesis used as its main framework the concept of *memoryscape* which enabled to approach the Moldovan contested debate about memory of forced Soviet deportations as a metaphorical landscape where various memories meet, emerge, shift or disappear. The *memoryscape* consists of ‘realms of memory’ – a concept coined by Pierre Nora – that serves as depositories of memory that uphold the identity and memory of communities. The empirical data have been analysed through various theories and approaches of memory studies such as post-memory, antagonistic memory, cosmopolitan memory, ‘institutionalised amnesia’, forced silence, recuperative memory, or ‘my-their’ memory.

In the thesis it was argued that in order to secure social cohesion, social solidarity and sense of belonging, a coherent and understandable national narrative has to be introduced and accepted by majority of inhabitants. Without a shared common narrative the identity of the group is threatened, and the risks that the past keeps informing political decisions in the present increase. Yet, in Moldova, achieving any consensus about the country’s past or present is very challenging. The unclear memory politics, and varying interpretation of the recent past, has prevented the country from consolidating itself, and choosing a new direction for its further development. The result is that Moldova is somewhat ‘pending’ and ‘stuck’ in a stage of liminality, being not Soviet anymore, but also unable of creating a new consolidated post-Soviet identity. Ideological fights for the ‘nature’ of the country and its geopolitical leanings have divided Moldovan society into many groups that are only hardly able of any consensus and agreements. Competing identities of Romanianess, Moldovanism, and Soviet belonging accompanied by various identities of the many ethnic minorities make the memory landscape unclear and difficult to grasp.

One of the obstacles in the path of creating a new national narrative is the interpretation, perception and memory of the Soviet period, more concretely the repressions and deportations during the 1940s and the 1950s. Moldovan society has no clear and uncontested understanding of these repressions, and similarly the way how people who fell victims to Soviet deportations and political repressions have been perceived, might vary significantly person by person. The unequivocal recognition of the 1940s and 1950s wrongdoings has been missing, and the denial or marginalisation of people's suffering is rather spread in the society. This thesis discussed only a small chapter of uneasy Moldovan recent past, and yet the Stalinist deportations can serve as an example of how contested and fragmented the memory of a society can become, and what consequences it can have for the present, and for the future development of a country. The thesis sought to reveal the multi-layered dimension of remembering, commemorating and narrating the Soviet deportations and repressions in contemporary Moldova, respectively in Chisinau, by identifying the most important realms of memory that have been participating in creating its memoryscape: museums, monument and memory activist's projects.

The museums dealing with the Stalinist deportations convey the narrative of victimhood and suffering without allowing any counter-narratives to enter the debate. The ethnic-based vision of the Moldovan nation as being constituted solely of Romanian-speakers supports the dichotomy between 'we – Romanian-speakers' and 'they – Russian-speakers', and contributes little to reconciliation and cohesion in Moldovan society. Yet, considering the fact that only after the change of discourse in 2010 the memory politics shifted from omission and marginalisation of the Soviet repressions and deportations to more open approach, Moldova has been still on the beginning of the process of recuperating its memory of the recent past, and as such strong emotional investment and a sort of intransigence should not come as surprise. The Museum of Memory of the Nation which was the first Moldovan museum dealing with Soviet repressions, embodies the antagonistic memory of collective suffering and victimhood, and by emphasizing the ties with Romania it dismisses the Soviet period, and puts the whole era in a role of a deviation and aberration from normality. Similarly, the Museum of Soviet Occupation in Military Museum follows the pattern, and although it delivers the pan-Romanian message more on subliminal level than explicitly displaying it, the narrative of suffering and humiliation from hands of Soviets is undeniably present. The exhibition in the National Museum of Archaeology and History is then an example of progressing attempts for nuancing the story, yet it still keeps the ethnic-based

understanding of the Moldovan nation and describes positive Soviet memories as sort of infatuation.

The monuments in Chisinau cityscape show a certain indifference of Moldovans towards the recent past. As in the case of the monument dedicated to ‘Bessarabians massacred by Bolsheviks’ of which relocation due to an enlargement of a restaurant went unheeded, or the former KGB headquarter that, even though it still includes the interrogation cells, has not been recognised as a place of suffering or torture. The ‘provisional’ monument standing in front of the House of Government that has been already for nine years promising the construction of a proper monument to all the ‘victims of the Soviet occupation and totalitarian Soviet regime’ represents the indecisiveness of the official memory politics, and the unwillingness of Moldovan officials to step out of the simple populism that rests on keeping the status quo. The ‘Train of Sorrow’ as the only monument that has become a symbol of the deportations, and eventually also the leading venue for annual commemorations, was erected only in 2013 – 72 years after the first wave of deportations.

The main objective of the memory activists is to influence public debate, reshape the collective memory, and secure a more prominent place for the memory of Soviet repressions and 20<sup>th</sup> Century atrocities in the public discussion. In their opinion the representation of the Soviet repression and deportations is insufficient and de-contextualized, and they feel obliged to rectify it. In the environment of contested and fragmented memory the fights for the ‘historical justness’ may become very emotional. Their approaches may, however, differ significantly. Octavian Țicu, a politician who advocates for closer ties with Romania, and whose activity is focused on ethnic-Romanians who fell victims to Soviet repressions, has probably different approach in memory politics that Victor Popovici who intends to commemorate the atrocities of 20<sup>th</sup> Century regardless the ethnicity or political leanings of the victims, and Ghenadie Popescu with his deep emotional investment that is reflected in his artistic production also occupies distinct position on the memory landscape.

The thesis aimed to show what can be concluded about the memory of Soviet forced deportations from Moldavian SSR based on the analysis of Chisinau memoryscape. Most importantly, it revealed the unclear official memory politics, indifference of people and wide spread historical amnesia, competing narratives about Soviet period, and ‘myth’ of suffering fuelling the ethnic-based nationalism. The country has been ‘stuck’ in an extremely contested environment where many different narratives and interpretations compete with each other. The official memory politics is hesitating and unable to take a clear stance on the event and that only participates on escalation of the ideological fights within the society. The rather

spread ethnic-based victimhood nationalism that follows the simple black-and-white division of the ‘victims’ and the ‘perpetrators’, and which is often accompanied by perception of Romanian times as the ‘Golden Age’ and Soviet times as a ‘Dark Age’ stands in a sharp opposition with other approaches that emphasize the positive memory of Soviet period, and which tend to marginalise the Stalinist era. The debate which is from both sides based on uncritical defending of its own ‘historical truth’ without allowing any counter-narratives, has only very limited impact on any reconciliation and unification of the society.

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Kateřina Fuksová

**13. 5. 2019**

## Abstract in Estonian

### Stalinistlike küüditamiste mäletamine Moldovas: Chisinau mälumaastiku analüüs

Pärast Nõukogude Liidu kokkuvarisemist 1991. aastal sai Moldova Nõukogude Sotsialistliku Vabariigist Moldova Vabariik. Sarnaselt teiste Kesk ja Ida Euroopa postkommunistlike riikidega algas ka Moldovas nõukogudejärgse identiteedi loomise protsess. Selle raames oli paralleelselt majanduslike ja poliitiliste ümberkujundamistega vaja tegeleda ka Nõukogude pärandiga, sealhulgas poliitiliste repressioonide, Siberisse ja Kasahstani küüditamiste ning venestamise kogemusega.

Käesoleva lõputöö eesmärgiks on uurida erinevaid stalinistlike sundväljasaatmistele mäletamise viise Moldova pealinnas Chisinaus. Lõputöö tugineb mälumaastiku kontseptsioonile, mida mõistetakse kui metafoorset maastikku, kus mälestused liiguvad, puutuvad kokku, kinnitavad ja/või vaidlustavad muid mälestusvorme – või on nende poolt vaidlustatud. Mälumaastike mõiste toetub omakorda Maurice Halbwachsi 'kollektiivse mälu' ja Pierre Nora 'mälukohtade' käsitlustele. Nõukogude perioodi mälu Moldovas on killustatud ja fragmenteerunud ning üht ja ühist narratiivi sel perioodil toimunud sündmuste kohta ei ole. Väitekirj uurib konkreetseid mäluvaldkondi - muuseume, mäluaktivistide projekte, monumente - eesmärgiga välja selgitada nende roll mälu – ja narratiiviloomes protsessides.

Analüüsi tulemused osundavad ametliku mälupoliitika ebaselgusele lähiminekuviku osas ning ükskõiksusele ja laiaulatuslikule amneesiale avalikus sfääris, mis on põimitud võistlevate narratiividega Nõukogude minevikust ja ohvristaatust rõhutavale etnilise rahvuslusega. Individuaalsete mälupraktikate analüüs näitab aga ka, et samaaegselt on esile tõusnud püüded luua kaasavat "Moldova lugu", mis kõnetaks inimesi rahvuse ja poliitiliste veendumuste üleselt.

Uurimus toetub materjalile, mis on kogutud välitööl Moldovas 2018. aasta septembris ning Alexandru Ioan Cuza Ülikoolis Rumeenias 2019. aasta veebruaris ja märtsis. Keskendudes Moldova pealinnale Chisinaule, on käesoleva uurimuse järeldused üldistatavad Nõukogude perioodi mäletamise protsessidele Moldovas laiemalt.